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THE FOUR GOSPELS

AS

HISTORICAL RECORDS



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WILLIAMS AND NORGATE

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P R E F A C E

I HAVE had no other object in the present work than the ascertainment of fact. Nothing wholesome can be obtained from that which is not true. The traditionary beliefs of English-speaking men depend largely, if not wholly, on statements which are not true but which are held to be beyond doubt or question.

The soundness of the foundation on which these popular beliefs are said to rest can be determined only by a complete examination of the history contained, or supposed to be contained, in the New Testament writings. I have entered on such an examination in this volume ; and I have done so, I hope and believe, in a reverent and temperate spirit. 'Are these things so?' is the only question which I have cared to answer ; and they who feel that their first and last duty is to the truth will ask no other.

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THE FOUR GOSPELS AS HISTORICAL RECORDS

INTRODUCTION

WHAT is the theology and what is the real faith of the Church of England? No more momentous question than this can be addressed to the English nation generally. A majority of the people profess, it is said, to be members of the National Church; and all these are under precisely the same obligations. In this sense there is no distinction between the clergy and the laity; and the plea that the former have signed away a freedom which cannot be taken from the latter is not true in fact, and is worth nothing. The clergy have, it is true, made certain promises at their ordination; but the clergy and the laity are alike bound in the same degree to the language of the formularies, whatever this measure of obligation may be declared to be. The three Creeds are recited by clergy and laity alike; and, so long as they profess to be members of the Church of England, they are bound to assent to them. In the Baptismal Office the sponsors are called upon catechetically to declare their acceptance of every proposition in the Apostles' Creed; and in this catechetical form some of the propositions are put into a shape different from that which they bear in the Creed as used in the daily services. Whatever, again, the clergy may recite, the laity make their own by the solemn *Amen* which declares their assent to the terms of the prayer.

It is idle, therefore, to speak of any members of the Church of England (so long as they profess to be such) as possessing or

enjoying a freedom which does not belong to those who, being members, are also its officers. The supposition that any such difference exists is at bottom monstrous. Years have passed since Dean Stanley, dealing with the question of *Essays and Reviews*, protested against the temper of certain critics who passed by the lay contributor to that volume as 'comparatively blameless,' while they insisted that the truth or falsehood of statements made by the contributors in 'holy orders' was a matter of no consequence, as they had chosen to resign their natural liberty. For Dean Stanley there was something peculiarly malignant in such charges; and he protested with all his might against the notion 'that truth was made for the laity and falsehood for the clergy,—that truth is tolerable everywhere except in the mouths of the ministers of the God of truth,—that falsehood, driven from every other quarter of the educated world, may find an honoured refuge behind the consecrated bulwarks of the sanctuary.' Such a theory of the National Church he denounced as godless; and he declared emphatically that, if such charges could be substantiated, it would be the bounden duty of all, both clergy and laity, 'in the name of religion and of common sense, to rise as one man and tear to shreds such barriers between the teachers and the taught, between Him whose name is truth and those whose worship is only acceptable if offered to him in spirit and in truth.'

The clergy and the laity of the Church of England have therefore the same duties, and are under the same obligations; and if they profess that the foundation of their religion is strictly historical, the first work which they have to do is to determine whether, and how far, this conviction is tenable. Are then all the members of the Church of England bound to admit, and still more to maintain, the proposition, that the cardinal dogmas or truths of Christianity are also historical events? I deny the proposition. But we cannot stop here, for they who make this claim for what they declare Catholic truth assert also, for the most part, that they who call it into question have no right to claim the title of Christians, and, more especially, that all who,

questioning it, hold office in the Church of England, are, in plain words, traitors and apostates. That the conditions of the fight are laid down with sufficient clearness it is impossible to deny; and the answer which I have to give is given in the name of the whole body, clerical and lay, of the members of the Church of England.

My purpose, then, is to put into the plainest form what I believe to be the essence of the teaching of the Church of England, and so, if it be possible, to bring to a final issue the great question on which must depend our conceptions of the nature of the divine work on this our earth and in the universe. The conclusions here reached are justified and upheld, directly or by legitimate inference, by the series of Judgements which have been delivered by the Sovereign in Council as the final interpreter of the standards and formularies of the Church of England. These decisions, it is well known, have given deep offence to one or other of the great parties or schools comprised within its limits. It was known that they must do so. But this was not regarded as a reason for withholding them, the very object of these decisions being, for the most part, to define the degree of freedom allowed to the clergy and laity. The Judgement in the Gorham case, for example, declared that the position of the defendant in the Church of England was tenable; but it did not declare that the position of Dr. Phillpotts, the Bishop of Exeter, was not tenable.

It is impossible to speak of schools or parties in a religious body without using names which those parties might repudiate; and if we apply to them the terms 'high,' 'low,' or 'broad,' we do so only because it is not easy to speak of them in any other way. It is, indeed, a fact of the greatest moment that the position of all these three parties is perfectly tenable in the Church of England. Any one of them has as much right to be where it is as has either of the other two. But not one of them can silence or exclude the others, and all three together do not constitute the Church of England; and therefore, even the unanimity of all members of all the three parties or schools could not prove the position of some one thinker, not belonging to any of them, to be untenable within

its limits, until it has been decided so to be by the Sovereign in Council.

It must not be forgotten that, apart from and beyond these divisions, the jurisdiction of the Sovereign in Council is the fundamental principle of the Church of England, and that the interpretation of its standards and formularies, and therefore of its real theology and its real faith, belongs to the Sovereign in Council, and not to convocations, synods, or any other ecclesiastical assemblies whatsoever. It follows that they who accept these interpretations are they whose position in the Church of England is most of all legitimate and assured. There is actually no Church of England apart from the body of which the Sovereign in Council is the interpreter.

This principle of the Royal Supremacy I assert heartily. It is not, perhaps, invidious to say that a large proportion of the members of the Church of England, and especially of the clergy, do not. From this special point of view they who think with me are loyal members of that Church, and they who dissent are not. In saying this I am simply claiming a freedom to which every member of the Church of England has an equal right with myself. They may avail themselves of it or not, as they may judge best. All that is here maintained is that the conclusions set forward in this volume are in themselves tenable, and are declared to be tenable by the whole series of judgements delivered in the final Court of Appeal by the Sovereign, and that, in fact, they represent the theology of the Church of England more exactly than does the theology of the great High Church or Low Church parties.

These convictions differ very widely from the beliefs avowed by the members of these parties; but the point on which it is most of all necessary to insist is that, probably without a single exception, all who belong to these schools admit in certain cases the great principle at stake, by giving a strictly spiritual interpretation to propositions which seem to denote historical facts, and which certainly carry on their face only a sensuous or material meaning. Among these propositions one of the most notable is

the assertion of the visible or bodily ascent of the Eternal Son into a local heaven, followed by session at the right hand of God. It matters not by what methods attempts may be made to get over the difficulty; but the fact will not be disputed that this assertion is spiritualised or, as some would say, explained away. The child who is being instructed in the Creeds is told that God is a Spirit, formless, yet present everywhere, and therefore that we cannot, except by a figure, speak of him as having hands or feet, eyes or ears. One such instance is as effectual as a hundred. The principle of spiritual interpretation is conceded; and if this proposition is not to be taken literally, the same may be said of the propositions which speak of the Eternal Son as born of the Virgin Mary, or as tried before Pontius Pilate.

But this is not the only instance in which the most pronounced traditionalists interpret spiritually propositions which in the letter are gross, material, and carnal. No clergyman could or would, in so many words, tell a child that the graves of the churchyard will all one day be opened, when the angel's trumpet summons mankind to judgement,—that the material particles laid in the coffin will all be used again by the living agent, or spirit, or self, or man, who had laid them aside,—that there will be any visible great assize at which all men will simultaneously appear, any vision of angelic forms in our sensible atmosphere, still less a material trumpet sounding from our aerial heavens in the ears of the physically living and the so-called physically dead. The child may be left to imagine that it will be thus, and may be so taught as to make it likely that he will so think. The extent of wrong thus done may not be easily measured; but the sensuous or literal meaning cannot be baldly propounded as the real one.

Here, then, we have a series of propositions dealing with matters of faith, which seem to say one thing and are universally admitted to mean another, and in which the letter is discarded for the spirit: and these matters include subjects not less momentous than the uprising and the judging of the quick and the dead. It becomes, therefore, logically impossible to say that, although the

letter by itself is killing or mischievous, yet the spirit in some instances carries the letter along with it, and is true because, and only because, it does so.

To assert this proposition would be in effect to maintain that the theology and the faith of the Church of England rest on a number of historical incidents, in such sense that, if these incidents should not have occurred at some particular time or place, that faith and theology would fall or crumble away. No such proposition is found or can be extracted from the Prayer-Book or Articles; and it is not easy to see precisely how it could be formulated. I do, indeed, maintain the converse; and even from the little that has been said already, it follows of necessity that I, and they who may think and speak as I do, represent the true mind of the Church of England more nearly and faithfully than they who may oppose us. I believe that this mind is most fully expressed by the Creed known as the Nicene; and with this Creed I find myself in thorough accord. I accept as true every sentence contained in it in its real spiritual signification. This Creed is the expression of the doctrine of the Eternal Word (Logos, Sophia, Wisdom), and needs no other evidence than that which may be adduced for these doctrines,—that is, evidence simply spiritual; and for eternal truth is not this the only evidence which we can have or even conceive?

If things be thus in the Church of England, there is manifestly a great work to be forthwith done within it, a work which is indispensably necessary, and immediately needed. Whatever be the merits or the demerits of their faith, the English are certainly a religious people; and the Church of England is unquestionably the most important of all the religious bodies in this country. It is a prime necessity, therefore, that this great body should be in the van of English thought. I am but expressing my deep conviction, when I say that the result must sooner or later be disastrous, if the Church of England should be guided by either of the two great schools or parties within it. It cannot be said that either of these parties lays any stress on the search for truth. Both assert

that they are in possession of it. I deny the assertion. They may possess some of it; they are blind to much more, and therefore fail to see that the promise of spiritual guidance into all truth is a process to which we can assign no end. By an absurdity, the extravagance of which could not easily be exceeded, these conservative theologians assume that it was a work done once for all, in a few hours or a few minutes, for the apostolic or missionary college at Jerusalem, and that its fruits have been handed down ever since by the laying on of hands through the long series of their successors, who therefore, if not infallible, are at the least indefectible, in their possession and defence of this truth.

But these parties, happily, whether taken singly or collectively, do not constitute the Church of England, though they are included in it; nor are those doctrines as to which they may be unanimously agreed necessarily doctrines of the Church of England. The prevalent or popular High Church ideas as to the apostolic succession or the power of the keys, for example, are simply the ideas of a school or party, and nothing more. They may be held within the Church of England; they cannot be enforced on any who may reject them. They affect to deny that the Church of England speaks in the last resort through the Sovereign; but nevertheless only from the Sovereign in Council comes the decisive interpretation which determines the meaning of the standards and formularies. The schools or parties may, and often do, reject these interpretations; but their rejection of them cannot affect those who accept them; and if such words are to be used, the latter are properly the orthodox members of the Church of England, and the adherents of the great parties are not. No one is called upon now to do more than express his general approval of the doctrine (not doctrines) and discipline of the Church of England; and until it can be shown that my assertions run counter to the fundamental principles and essential teaching of that Church, the man who makes them (whether I or any other) cannot be condemned.

This at once sweeps away all obligation of adhering to each separate proposition of any particular Article; and still less, there-

fore, can any particular proposition found in the Creeds be isolated and urged against him. The Articles relating to faith can and must be interpreted spiritually, and are indeed without strength or meaning if interpreted in any other way. We may take the fourth Article, on the uprising. Here the real assertion of essential truth is that the Eternal Son of God is truly risen. This is absolutely true. He is risen, for he is eternally dead to sin, and eternally risen from the death of sin. It is impossible that he should be holden of this death, which is the only real death. This is the burden of the teaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles: it is the fundamental teaching of the Church of England.

It may be said that this is mysticism. I deny this utterly, except in the sense in which all theological language is mystical. If by the expression, 'the right hand of God,' we mean the greatest height and the profoundest depth of his goodness, his truth, and his love, then we are using this phrase mystically; and if we do not use it in this mystical or spiritual sense, it has no meaning whatever. It is the same with every theological term. If we speak of God as the Father of all mankind, we are using the words not in the sense of the fatherhood of human generation, but in quite another and higher sense,—that is, in its mystical or spiritual, and therefore in its only true and real sense. If any should be assailed on the ground of contravening this fourth Article, the reply is that there is absolutely no one who adheres, or professes to adhere, throughout to its letter. There is not one who ventures, or dares venture, to say that a visible human form is sitting in a certain place, and that this place or throne is at the right hand of God the Eternal Father. But, as I have already said, if one clause or sentence is to be interpreted spiritually or mystically, why not every other? Who is to restrict the application of the only method which invests any theological term with any life, force, or meaning? Taken literally, the phrase 'the right hand of God' is a gross anthropomorphism. So in the Eucharistic phrases, 'Take, eat—this is my body,' 'Drink—this is my blood,' we have, as Dean Stanley

plainly said, the language of a cannibal feast, if the words are to be taken in their literal meaning. They cease to be gross, carnal, and in the highest degree offensive, only when they are understood mystically,—that is, in the only sense which will make them even tolerable to any decently minded man. To suppose that the literal meaning could be enforced by the law of the Church of England would be mere madness; and if this be so, another mass of terms relating to the highest act of Christian worship is to be taken in a sense totally different from that which in their literal signification they would assuredly convey.

It is of no use now, since the change in the form of subscription, to fall back on any one Article. It would have been of no use, even before that change, to fall back upon the sixth Article, in order to obtain a sanction for the common notions of which the traditional schools are apt to speak as the doctrines of Christianity. The subject of this Article is not, as it is generally supposed to be, the authority of the Holy Scriptures, but their efficacy for salvation. In other words, this Article affirms that a man may get from them all the moral instruction and spiritual comfort which he needs; and who would deny this? The word 'authority' is used in the Article later on; but no attempt is made to define the term, which may here mean 'potency or efficacy for instruction in things pertaining to spiritual health and strength.' This also no one would wish to dispute. But a man may have authority who may yet go wrong and do wrong; and the Scriptures may have authority without being right in all their statements.¹

For the members of the Church of England, however, the whole

¹ This is asserted with all plainness in the Clementine Homilies, ii. 31, iii. 50, xviii. 20, the passage quoted being one which runs parallel with xii. 24 of our Gospel according to Mark. The latter speaks of those who err because they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. The Homilies utterly upset the common notion of the infallibility of Holy Writ, which is read into the sentence. According to this writer, the Great Teacher was not upholding the authority of the writings of the Old Testament (none others were as yet in existence), but was warning his hearers against their fallibility. The verse in the Clementine Homilies is followed by the words, 'And Peter said, If therefore of the scriptures some are true and some are false, our Teacher rightly said, Be ye trusty money-changers, as in the writings there are some approved sayings and some spurious.'

subject has been set at rest by Dr. Lushington's well-known Judgement. Some of his rulings were appealed against, and all so appealed against were reversed; but the portions not appealed against (and this is among them) are law. Briefly, Dr. Lushington declared that any clergyman is at liberty to reject certain statements in certain books of the Holy Scriptures, and even whole books, whether it be on the ground that they are historically inaccurate and untrustworthy, or that their teaching is wrong. This is sweeping language, which admits of no exception in favour of any book over the rest.

Nor can any positive conclusion be drawn from the declaration that the Articles contain the doctrine of the Church of England, and that this doctrine is agreeable to God's Word. There is no question as to the first proposition, and there is no definition of the second. It is nowhere said that God's Word is the Bible, or that the Bible is God's Word; and any proposition laid down for the purpose of enforcing such a conclusion has been summarily and in terms swept away by the Judgement of Dr. Lushington. According to this Judgement the 'Holy Scriptures' are writings which are intended to instruct and comfort men and to lead them to God; and *to that extent*, he says, they have the sanction of the Almighty, but nothing more.

We can hardly imagine a declaration more momentous than this, if it is to be acted upon; and for those who feel it to be their duty to ascertain the truth of facts, so far as it may be possible to do so, the supreme question is whether the principle so laid down is to be acted upon or not. The natural instinct of those who maintain a traditional theology will be to keep that Judgement a mere letter, inert and inoperative. It may probably be said with truth, that the most far-reaching propositions which any clergyman has since that time laid down are virtually nothing more than repetitions of the Judgement, or necessary inferences from it. If it be said, for instance, (1) that the divine work in the world is in no way necessarily bound up with, or dependent upon, the historical accuracy of any written record, or (2) that religion in no way

depends on the truth or falsity of the narratives or precepts of the Hebrew or any other Scriptures, this has been practically asserted by that Judgement a quarter of a century ago. But if such propositions be true in the general, they are true also in the particular; and the principle on which they rest must be acted upon everywhere, if men are to be really awakened to the importance of it.

In other words, there must be a serious and thorough examination of the basis, not only of what is passed off as the theology of the Church of England, but of the whole mass of unauthoritative and often extravagant and mischievous notions and superstitions which are habitually passed off as the common creed of Christendom. The waters which are flowing in a back eddy must be made to move forwards. Except on the assumption that all the recorded incidents of the four Gospels are veritable facts of history, this onward movement is indispensable and immediately necessary; and it is useless to argue that, if religion does not depend on the historical accuracy of the New Testament narratives, it can make no difference whether the Gospel histories be trustworthy or not. They who insist on the scrutiny would still be mere units against myriads, struggling desperately under the burdens of a crushing traditional system. Should a fresh trial be followed by another Judgement similar to, or more explicit even than, that of Dr. Lushington, they would still set to work to ignore that Judgement, and to keep the people at large as ignorant of it as they are now kept ignorant of like Judgements. What then would be the gain? None, unless the question turned on points as to which they might feel that they could not hold their peace,—in other words, on points which might rouse men to think and to search for themselves. In all likelihood, if so stirred, they would make use of hard words, and would throw out insinuations or open charges of bad faith on their opponents. Charges of treachery are easily made; but they who make them might be confronted by the fact of their opponents maintaining that the theology of the Nicene Creed is a true theology, and that it is the theology of the Church of

England,—a perfectly spiritual theology resting on a purely spiritual basis.

The battle can no longer be fought on any except essential questions. The Judgement in the case of *Essays and Reviews* makes it impossible to institute a prosecution against any who might assert that the narrative of the Book of Joshua is untrue in every particular, and deliberately fictitious, such a person as Joshua never having lived; or, again, that the Book of Deuteronomy was written in the time of Josiah, or that the Books of Chronicles are a wilful and systematic falsification of the history of the Books of Kings. The events of the last fifty years have at least inforced this lesson. But the scrutiny must be carried further, if it should appear that there is need of so doing; and in my conviction the need is supreme. In spite of decisions which have gone against them, the tyranny of traditional opinions continues much what it was, and we are little, if at all, nearer to the settlement of the great debate. We can approach this settlement only by pushing to its logical consequences the principle sanctioned by the Judgement of Dr. Lushington, that is, by an impartial and complete examination of the history of the New Testament from beginning to end.

In theory, the freedom of the clergy and laity of the Church of England is won. But the acknowledgement of this victory has not been made by the members of the great traditional schools. On the contrary, the more the right to this freedom has been assured by the decisions of the Ecclesiastical Courts and the Judgements of the Sovereign in Council, with the greater pertinacity is the claim to the possession of an infallible authority, whether of a Church, or of a book, or of a set of books, asserted. Nor is this assertion made on the ground of the tenability of their position in a Church which has been founded on, and which exists by, compromise. It is insisted upon with the vehemence which implies that they who dissent from it do so to their never-ending loss,—that they are enemies of the faith, of religion, of truth, of morality, of all that is right and all that is good, and that, therefore, if they are not placed beyond the pale of all decent fellowship, they ought

to be. It is indispensably necessary, therefore, that they shall be compelled to admit the existence of this compromise, to acknowledge that the great parties popularly known as those of High Churchmen and Low Churchmen are parties who are enabled to continue to work in the same religious body only by virtue of this compromise, which embraces the broadest as well as the highest and the lowest. They must be made to acknowledge that the position of the broadest is as tenable in the Church of England as is that of any others, and that, in point of fact, it is they who represent most nearly the true mind of the body to which they belong. No room must be left to traditionalists for the iteration of large-sounding concessions which they instantly withdraw by re-stating, in different words, the propositions which their concessions had seemed to yield up. Such a result cannot be brought about, or even hoped for, if the truth, so far as it has been ascertained, be not proclaimed with what may be called startling clearness. No doubt they would vehemently deprecate such disquieting language. It is enough to say that their opponents see the absolute and indispensable need of it, and have an equal right to express their convictions. It is useless to repeat demands which involve a complete begging of the whole question. Except in the eyes of those who in whatever form maintain the opinions of the traditional schools, the present state of things is pre-eminently and intolerably unwholesome. On the strength of dogmatic propositions, which have no authority whatever, the people generally are still under the dominion of strangely material, gross, and carnal ideas, and their minds are not clearly and properly awake. They must be made to see that their leaders do, in fact, yield to their opponents a great deal more than they are usually supposed to yield. In short, the average folk (by their own fault, no doubt) are left very much in the dark, and their guides find the state of things not an inconvenient one for themselves. Among the bishops and the clergy generally, not a few make use of two different forms of expression at different times and before different hearers. They have, for instance, as we have seen, really given up

the notion that Jesus left the earth from the summit of a small Judæan hill, and that he sits on a throne by the right hand of God—in the merely literal sense of all these words. Yet to their congregations they will speak as though the historical *fact* of the visible ascent from Olivet was beyond all doubt and all question. It is here, and in all the points to which this leads, that they must be made to avow their conclusions in the face of day, honestly, without dissimulation and without evasion. What it comes to is this, that they are clinging (or allowing those who choose so to think to suppose that they are clinging) to a terribly material interpretation of spiritual truths, while they know that some of the popular beliefs are untrue, and even admit to educated opponents that they are untrue. They cannot but be aware that if they give up the material or visible ascent from Olivet, they give up also the idea of the material, visible, or sensible resurrection. On the theory, so fiercely insisted upon by traditionalists, that the framework of Christianity is strictly historical,—that is to say, sensible or material,—the visible ascent was a corporeal necessity, for a visible body must be either here or not here. The writer of the so-called Acts of the Apostles, having stated that Jesus was here for forty days after his resurrection, has to account for the fact that he was here no longer; and he accounts for it by making him go up into the air in the sight of all the disciples. It is undoubtedly meant to be pictured as a final leave-taking. If they who give up this final visible ascent from the hill-top say that after his resurrection he could come and go at will, pass through closed doors and vanish instantaneously from a supper-table, they do so at a dreadful cost, for they reduce the narrative in Acts to a bit of stage-play. According to this theory, he had ascended already many times, and might do so any number of times more. But in the narrative of Acts this visible ascent from Olivet is the only ascent after the resurrection, and messengers from heaven are made to appear in order to announce his formal visible return when the time of the great consummation has come.

Can they for whom the ascertainment of truth is the first object and the last rest content with such contradictory representations as these? They cannot do so. The theology of the Creed called the Nicene is merely killed by the traditional or historical readings which have been introduced into it, and have been allowed to overlie it. With these readings there comes in, of necessity, a constant confusion or collision of two antagonistic sets of ideas. There may possibly have been something of this confusion in the minds of some or most of those who took part in the formulating of this Creed. But there can be little doubt, or rather there can be none, that men like Gregory of Nyssa knew well that they were dealing with spiritual truths only. The language here applied to God the Son (God the Revealed) is absolutely without meaning if restricted to one man who appeared, according to our fourth Gospel for two or three years, and according to the Synoptics for a few months only, in Judæa and Galilee.

A further consequence of this so-called historical traditionalism is the necessity of asserting that in the Gospels we have the picture of an absolutely perfect life, and then of proving in detail that this is so. There is, happily, no need of entering into the question of absolute perfection. It is enough to say that, if we can conceive it, it is beyond the power of mortal man to exhibit it at work in all the relations of practical life. Unless it be in terms denied that the Evangelists, whoever they were, were men of like passions and infirmities with ourselves, it is certain that any portrait which they might draw would reflect those feelings and weaknesses in greater or less measure. This would be the case even if they were eye-witnesses of all that they relate; but no one pretends that more than two of the Evangelists were personal followers of the Great Teacher, and no one could venture to maintain that either of them set down his recollections in writing within less than five-and-twenty or thirty years after the time with which they deal, or that the fourth Gospel was put together till the Evangelist was eighty or ninety years of age—that is, at least half a century after the time of which it is supposed

to be a record. It is folly to put out of sight the natural action of time upon the strongest memory, even when aided by habits of the most exact thought; and deep as the impression of their Master's goodness may have been on the minds of Matthew and of John, this impression, as the years went by, must have been modified indefinitely by the gradual change wrought in their own intellectual and spiritual condition. Of the authors or compilers of the second and third Synoptics, all that can be said is that their evidence admittedly comes to us at second hand, and that those writers, and all who like them tried to furnish a picture of perfect life in thought, word, and deed, would inevitably paint a picture, the atmosphere of which would be their own. We may endow the Evangelists themselves with faculties far beyond those of the ordinary folk of their own day, although we have no special grounds for so doing; but we cannot forget that the words of Jesus, as given in all the Gospels, speak of his disciples generally as among the dullest and grossest of the most dull and stupid peasantry in the world. But Englishmen, even of the most thoughtful kind, never stop to think of the moral and intellectual conditions under which the whole Jewish people lived at the time when the Christian Church first began to take shape. It was, in truth, an age of the most degraded and deadening superstition,—an age in which an order of the universe was a conception unknown to all except two or three minds at the most, and to them present most dimly and imperfectly,—an age in which men were as ignorant, intolerant, and bigoted as they were superstitious, and therefore as prejudiced and cruel as they were intolerant. How would it be possible for men born and bred under such conditions to hand down the picture of a life which would appear perfect in the eyes of a remote posterity? They might write under the most profound conviction that they were doing so, and they might strive to the utmost of their power to realise their idea. But there would remain a multitude of statements which nineteen or twenty centuries later would appear inadequate, imperfect, mistaken; others which would seem ill

judged or wrong, and others, again, which would be set aside as altogether repulsive.

There is absolutely nothing in all this which needs in the smallest degree to reflect on the character of the Great Master; but if beings higher than ourselves can watch the drama of human life, it must assuredly be to them one of the saddest sights to see sincere and conscientious men striving vainly to justify all the details of the picture so drawn—striving to show that things imperfect, wrong, and repulsive are not wrong or repulsive or imperfect, merely because they will not take the trouble to look into all the circumstances and conditions under which that picture was produced. The prodigy of the swine and the devils in the Gadarene country is repulsive; the finding of the tribute-coin in the mouth of the fish is grotesque; the multiplication of the loaves and fishes implies a thousand insuperable difficulties of which they who framed the narrative never dreamed. The fierce denunciation of the Pharisees in the house of a Pharisee who had offered the hospitality of his roof scarcely agrees with our ideas of ordinary courtesy, and would never be thought now so to agree but for theories of Biblical or other infallibility which must be maintained at all costs.

It cannot, therefore, be too often or too earnestly repeated that we say not one word in disparagement of the Great Teacher, if we criticise, as we must criticise, the pictures which the Evangelists have left us of him. These pictures come to us from unknown hands; and it is impossible to say how far any of the features may be faithfully drawn, although we know that many of them are distorted, and some may be actually unsightly. If we choose to take such portraiture as absolutely faultless, it is we only who are to blame, and we must pay the penalty; and this penalty is the necessity of speaking to the ignorant or half-educated, or the unthinking, in terms which for us involve a habit of dishonesty. Such a habit of speaking must eventually be fatal in any religious body. It is not merely fatal but without excuse in the Church of England, which imposes no such necessity upon any of its members;

and in turning away from these traditional notions to the real teaching of the English Church, we seem to pass from a vitiated and choking atmosphere into clear and wholesome air.

This teaching asserts that there is a revelation (or as we Englishmen should rather say, an unfolding or unveiling) of truth going on before men, and in all men in all times and in all places. This work is the work of God; but God in himself, in his wisdom and his power, is both unrevealed and unrevealable. No finite or bounded mind can comprehend or apprehend his infinite perfection. He is 'everlasting, without body, parts, or passions, the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible.' He is in all things, and all things are in him; for in him all live, and are moved, and are. Human language, which is a poor vehicle for the expression of any spiritual truth, is utterly inadequate when applied to the one living God, the eternal Mind, in whose life alone we have life; and so, being driven to use a sign miserably poor and weak, we speak of God in himself, unrevealed and unrevealable, as God the Father.

But God is, nevertheless, manifest or being manifested. He is made known in all his works, in the laws which sustain and guide all worlds, in the hearts and consciences of all men; and the name by which we speak of God thus being manifested is God the Son.¹

¹ In a paper published in the *Christian Reformer* (February 1886), Dr. Martineau says that for the men under whom the Trinitarian theology grew up God the Father is 'God as he exists in himself, ere he at all appears,' and then adds: 'Let now the silence be broken, let the thought burst into expression, fling out the poem of creation, evolving its idea in the drama of history, and reflecting its own image in the soul of man, then this manifested phase of the Divine existence is the Son, i.e. it is the Logos, Verbum, Word. . . . The one fundamental idea by which the two personalities are meant to be distinguished is simply this, that the first is God in his primeval essence—infinite meaning without finite indications; the second is God speaking out in phenomena and fact, and leaving his sign wherever anything comes up from the deep of things or merges back again.' This, in Dr. Martineau's judgment, explains the fact that the Creeds or Symbols have very little to say of the Father. 'You cannot fail,' he says, 'to remark that one thing only is said respecting him in the Nicene Creed, viz. that he is Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and that even this does not distinguish him from the Second Person, of whom it is affirmed that by him all things were made.' But inasmuch as 'it is of the very essence of his perfection *not* to remain self-enclosed,' and as 'a manifest-

All that we can say of him flows necessarily from this one assertion. God the Son is God being made plain and clear to us, and he must, therefore, be the very brightness of the Father's glory and the very character of his substance. He must be co-equal with him and co-eternal. If we use the word or sign 'begotten' to express in some sense our conception of God as being unfolded before us and in us, we must of necessity speak of him as begotten before all worlds, as God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,—as being (to use another weak sign) of one substance with the Father. We must speak of all things as being made and sustained by him, without whom nothing has been made that is made. In the conception thus formed of him he is the Son, the Son who is the only begotten, in whom God the Father is seen by his children; and the path, so pointed out, at once leads to and accounts for the language which attempts (however poorly) to express his relation to the Father and the Father's work. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and except in and through him we cannot come to the Father (John xiv. 6). He alone has seen and sees the Father by whom he is sent and comes (or is made manifest) to us. The Father's work is therefore his work; the

ing universe is the everlasting efflux of his will,' it follows that 'the Word is eternal as himself. This then is what is meant by the assertion that the Son is co-eternal with the Father; and, so understood, it is an attempt to correct our first and false impression that God existed for a period before he acted. . . . It denies that the difference is one of time, brings the two in that respect into coalescence, and for the relation of after and before bids us substitute that of ever-rising phenomena and ever-abiding ground. . . . The moment anything arises, it is the Son, upon whom, therefore, all the finite facts and objects which express and exemplify for us the divine nature and providence crowd to form and fill up his attributes.' On this point Dr. Martineau rightly lays the greatest stress. The Nicene theology would be idolatry 'if the Trinitarian, speaking of the Son, intended the historical Jesus of Palestine; if, taking up that image and starting from that point of chronology, he began to expand it till he enthroned it in the heavens and let it pass as an equal element into the previous light of God. But his way of thought is, in fact, the reverse of this method. The Son comes before him not as an historical personage at all, but is God's eternal expression of himself, the thought he puts forth in all his works and ways, manifested through all ages by nature and history, but concentrated with unique brilliancy in the character and existence, the holy life and redeeming work of Jesus, in whom the Spirit so dwelt without measure that he was the very Word made flesh.'

Father's will is his will. He judges not of himself, because his judgement is the judgement of his Father; and they who come to him can come only by the will, the working, the drawing of the Father.¹ As being thus manifested for man and to man, he is said to come down from the heavens. He must so come down, for otherwise he could not be manifested or made known to us at all. He must be unfolded to our senses and our mind, to our hearts and to our consciences: in other words, he must lower himself to the measure of the faculties which he himself has given to us. He must draw all men to himself (John xi. 32); and thus the work which God the Son has to do is the work of advancing and bringing about the kingdom of the Father, the kingdom of truth, righteousness, and love. To this kingdom all his creatures are to be brought; and not until they are so brought can sin and evil be destroyed and God be the all in all. Weak and ignorant now, they are to be made strong and filled with wisdom. Imperfect and diseased, they are to be made sound and whole. As doing this work in them and for them, he is the anointed one, the healer (Jesus the Christ), of whom we think as leaving the heavens to stoop down to our poor minds and our narrow abode.

Having reached this point, we come to another class of signs which may seem to express conceptions which outwardly are not altogether in accordance with some others (already noticed) which seek to set forth the work and the office of the Eternal Son. In himself, in the infinitude of his perfection, the Father is unknown to us, and must be so always. In himself, the Father is without body, parts, or passions. But to us the Kosmos, or Universe, which declares the glory of God and sets forth what we call his handiwork, is full of a bitter agony. It is groaning and struggling in pain together from the beginning until now. On this earth in which we live there is weakness of body and of mind; there is

¹ John vi. 44. The contradiction between this sentence and John xiv. 6 is apparent. In the latter none can come to the Father but through the Son, the only way. In the former none can come to the Son except by the act of the Father. The two propositions are both logical inferences from the conception of the unrevealed God and God the revealed.

blindness, perversity, obstinacy, disobedience, rebellion, foul uncleanness, cruelty, and unutterable wrong. This wrong is to be conquered and put out for ever. Truth is to destroy falsehood, righteousness is to vanquish all iniquity; and this extinction of evil, and of the misery and death which come of it, will be the consummation of the Divine work in the universe. This is the work of the Father, and it is, therefore, also the work of the Son. 'My Father works always, and I work.' It is the Father's work as made known to us in the working of the Son. It is a conflict in which it may be said that the Son humbles himself, is tried or tempted, suffers and conquers, so that his work may become apprehensible by beings as weak and dull-sighted as men. But the life of men is the life of God, who is the source and the support of all life. All live to him and in him; and therefore they live also in the life of the Eternal Son, who knows all their want and all their weakness more fully than they can know them themselves. He thus unites their imperfect nature with the fulness of his own perfection; and the manhood and the Godhead are hence joined together in an inseparable union. His creatures form in him one organic whole. He takes up his tabernacle in their flesh, and they are thus enabled to behold his glory, full of grace and truth (John i. 14). He is thus (if we must use Latin rather than English words) incarnate; and the blessings of his incarnation are assured to, and will in the end become the lot of, all his rational and moral creatures. The world, the universe, is full of struggle and pain, of the wear and tear of life; and it was made subject to this waste or vanity, not of its own will, but by the will of the Father, who has so made it subject on the footing of hope (that is, in truth, of a fixed purpose), because the whole creation shall in the end be brought to the freedom of the glory of the children of God.¹

¹ I believe that these words fairly give the meaning of Rom. viii. 20, 21. The R.V. translates ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ὅτι by the words 'in hope that.' It is hard to see how ὅτι can express anything but a reason or fact. The sentence does not express a hope that something may take place, but declares that the present state of things is the result of a will which has brought it about on the footing of a sure expectation, on the ground that the whole creation shall one day be set free.

So, becoming man, he undergoes the conflict with evil, and is tried as they are tried, only (of necessity) without sin, for he is absolutely and eternally dead to all sin. Were he not so dead, he could not be the Eternal Son of the infinitely perfect Father.

This death to sin¹ is the absolute rejection of all sin, the eternal choosing of truth over falsehood, of righteousness over wrong. But this choice is the choosing of life and light. It is itself life and light; and therefore the death of the Eternal Son is also in itself the uprising to life,—in Greek and Latin phrase, a Resurrection and an Anastasis. But this his death and this his life are death and life for all. There is not one of his moral and responsible children who must not be partaker of his death in order that he may be a sharer of his life. This death and this life are both blessings coming from him and flowing out from him to all. In his death and in his life he is spotless; and his death is, therefore (in the familiar Latin phraseology), the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world or Kosmos,—for all sin. So being dead and so living, he ascends to heaven by an eternal ascent to the glory of the unrevealed and unrevealable Father. So triumph follows conflict and is assured by it. Truth, righteousness, and love are doing battle now with all that is opposed to them; and this is the first coming of the Eternal Son in lowliness and weakness. When the battle is over and evil is extinguished for ever, he will have come for the second time in power and great glory, and all his children, being cleansed and made sound and whole, shall shine forth as the stars in heaven.

¹ It is a favourite, and may be a necessary, practice with self-styled Catholic theologians to attempt to shut up their opponents to a dilemma presenting only one alternative. The writer of the essay on 'The Incarnation as the Basis of Dogma,' in *Lux Mundi*, asserts (p. 235) that the Anastasis of Jesus 'must stand its ground as a mere historical event.' 'All will be overthrown if this fact be not fact.' But for this fact all historical evidence fails us utterly; and it follows that the writers in *Lux Mundi* are on a wrong quest. What the writer of Romans vi. 10 says is that the Eternal Son dies eternally to sin and lives eternally to God; and with this plain assertion the dilemma of the essayist vanishes.

The divine work is thus a work for and in every man. It is a process and a training, for which there must be a teacher and trainer, ever abiding in them, ever guiding and raising them; and this guide and strengthener (or comforter) is the revealing and unfolding Spirit, God the revealer, God the Holy Ghost, the divine and quickening breath of the life of the unrevealed and unrevealable Father, who is manifested to our thought in the life, the work, the conflict, the death, the uprising of God the revealed, of God the Eternal Son. These three are one,—one eternal, living, and true God, in whom all live and are moved and are.¹

It is enough, therefore, to speak of God the revealer as we speak of God the unrevealable and of God the revealed; and as we speak of God the revealer we think of the Giver of life who must come (or proceed) from, or be the spirit or breath of, God the Eternal Father and God the Eternal Son,—of the divine teacher who speaks always and in all places by the mouth of all prophets and righteous men, guiding all towards all truth, not at once or by an instantaneous act, or by leaps, or by the conferring upon any vicars or vicegerents of an official immunity from errors, mistakes, blunders, and falsehoods, but by a training which is sure to attain the end proposed, and which has for its object the building up of one society or fellowship, universal and indivisible, of those who love the truth, and, loving the truth, love God,—one catholic and apostolic Church, which acknowledges one baptism only for the putting away (in Latin *remission*) of sin and evil, the baptism into the death of the Eternal Son, the death to sin, absolutely and for ever. This one individual fellowship or society has one faith, or

¹ The later Creed which bears the name of Athanasius introduces the Latin term *persona* with a connotation which the word did not originally carry; and a perfect labyrinth of confusion, and of equivocation more or less disingenuous, running on often into downright shiftiness and falsehood, has been the result. The history of the word has been given by Professor Max Müller in his *Biographies of Words*; and the theological contradictions and absurdities which have come up from the modern meanings attached to it are disposed of effectually, if we go back to the meaning of the word in the later ages of the Roman republic. It is enough to cite the words of Cicero: 'Tres personas unus sustineo, meam, accusatoris, judicis.'—WHATELY, *Logic*, s.v. *Persona*.

trust, or hope. It looks for the uprising of the dead,—the raising of all who are dead in sin from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and for the life (and the life only) of the world to come,—of the world in which all shall be cleansed from their impurity,—in which all shall have their wounds healed and the misery of evil assuaged for ever,—in which not one single creature that shares (as all share) the life of God shall be left in the darkness and anguish of sin, because all sin and all evil shall have been brought to an end for ever. In this faith we await the change which will take us away from this world of the outward senses, and of which we speak as the uprising of the body, the living power¹ which here makes use of the sensible particles which, when it has done with them, it lays aside altogether.

I have here given what I believe to be, in its essence, the theology and the faith of the Church of England. I have striven to give it as briefly as possible, not at all as meaning to exclude inferences legitimately flowing from any of these statements, but as purposing deliberately to reject all that is not, by implication at least, contained in them. It would be rash, and indeed it would not be honest, to maintain that the whole of this theology is peculiar to the Church of England, or to Christendom generally. Much of it is older than Christianity in any shape; and many factors have worked together to bring out this form of thought as I have tried here to set it down. The conception of the Eternal Wisdom has given place to the conception of the Eternal Son; but the language applied to the former is applicable, with but slight modification, to the latter.

To a still greater degree the theology which found expression in the Nicene Creed has been affected by the phraseology belonging to the ancient systems of sacrifice. It is not necessary here to trace in detail the various steps of the refining process which has got rid of very foul dross and left a large measure of pure ore. In so far as the idea of a gross material offering, intended to appease the wrath of an angry demon, or to satiate his appetite for blood, has

¹ Butler, *Analogy*, Part I. ch. i.

given place to the idea of the spiritual submission of a contrite heart longing only to grow in goodness, this is the work of God the revealer, the Holy Ghost or breath; but there is no room for surprise or wonder if the terminology of the old practices has survived in the language of the newer and higher faith. The death of the Eternal Son is the death to sin, which is for all creatures the pledge that all shall in the end die the same death and therefore rise to his eternal life. But as so dying and so living on their behalf, he is spoken of as humbling himself to death, and as being in this immolation himself the victim and himself the priest. We thus find ourselves brought at once to the language of the Eucharistic Office, in which the terms 'flesh' and 'blood,' 'bread' and 'wine,' are employed to denote the nourishment of the spiritual life. In a like way the words which expressed the old ideas of baptismal purifications kept their ground, when the baptism to which they pointed became the baptism into the death of the Eternal Son.

In no sense can it be said that either in Christendom or anywhere else has an indefectible heritage of truth (that is, of a definite body of final propositions) been possessed and maintained intact, unchanged, unmodified through a long series of centuries. This is the great fallacy of those who have misconceived the nature of that universal church or fellowship of which the Nicene Creed speaks. The idea of such immobility is in direct antagonism with the office and work of God the revealer, the Holy Spirit, in his abiding presence within the hearts of all men. The outward societies known as Christian churches have life only so far as they are growing in the truth; and they can so grow only by getting rid of that which is defective, erroneous, or false, so soon as it is seen to be such. In other words, if their existence is to be justified at all, their work must be to modify, so far as it may be needful to modify, the views popularly taken of Christianity and of the education of mankind generally. Not one of them has fully and fearlessly discharged this duty; many of them may never have attempted it. But the Church of England

certainly essayed the task, and in part achieved it at the Reformation.

Much more of like work is needed still. But even now, in this outline of the faith and the theology of the Church of England, there is nothing which should come into collision with the thought or the scientific method of the nineteenth or any other century. This theology does not oppose itself to the method of the historical critic, for it has nothing to do with any incidents of history. It cannot come into conflict with science in any of its myriad branches, because it does not deny, and has no motive for disputing, any facts which are proved to be facts, nor does it demand submission to any propositions which involve a rejection of these facts. But it does involve the rejection of a crowd of popular notions which form in a strange jumble the traditional creed of the vast majority of Christians. It does imply the falsehood of the idea which deludes them into the notion that they possess a literature of sacred books, gathered into a single volume, exact, flawless, free from all blemish and from all possibility of error. It does imply the summary rejection of many of those books, or of portions of them, as being both inexact and inaccurate, and sometimes erroneous, wilfully false and mischievous. It does sanction the duty of casting aside as unhistorical whatever may come to us without sufficient historical attestation.

In saying all this I need scarcely add that I have not dreamed of lessening by the smallest fraction the liberties of any of the schools or parties within the limits of the Church of England. I am not called upon to uphold positively the whole of the vast number of propositions contained in the Thirty-nine Articles; but there are few of them which I care to impugn, or should wish flatly to deny. I can say honestly that I approve the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England; and I am far from having any quarrel with the statements made in the Articles with reference to the writings of the Old Testament or the New. It is of vital importance to mark that these statements speak not of the authority of Holy Scripture, but only of their sufficiency for what is

termed salvation. I have already said that in the body of these books all may find 'sufficient' instruction, comfort, and guidance in the training which is to heal them from the plague and wounds of sin. But it can scarcely be necessary to say that the tyranny based on their supposed 'authority' has become an unbearable burden, of which Christendom must be rid before anything like a full and free growth can be looked for.

Here, then, is the broad issue—on the one side an iron and deadening bondage to a series of books, or to classes of men as guardians or interpreters of those books; on the other, a living faith or trust in the indwelling and the abiding work of the Divine Spirit—of the love which is stronger than the death of disobedience, uncleanness, and sin, and which will, therefore, in the end deliver us from that death. This faith or trust is at present choked by an overgrowth of narrow and debasing superstitions with which the Church of England has nothing whatever to do. These superstitions rest on, and are nourished by, the fallacy that the evidence for Christianity is to be found in what are termed signs, wonders, prodigies, miracles, or in the utterances of men whose words have been interpreted so as to suit events or incidents of ages long subsequent to their death. No fallacy can in the present age be more mischievous, or, indeed, more fatal.

On this ground, then, as members of the Church of England, whether clergy or laity, we may take our stand. As such, our first duty is to fix the attention of Englishmen on questions which cannot be put out of sight or out of mind. If there be no books anywhere which have a title to be exempted from the vigorous scrutiny and impartial judgement to which all books are subjected, it follows that the New Testament writings must be weighed in the same critical balance with those of the Old. The present volume lays bare the process, and gives the result of this strictly historical scrutiny; and we have to take all possible care that the bearings of this investigation on the liberties of the members of the Church of England shall not be misunderstood, and the controversy diverted to any false issue. In spite of all that has been done, we have to deal with books which are still held by

vast numbers to be in every way infallible. In this controversy all that we have to do is to ascertain whether certain alleged events took place as they are said to have taken place, or whether they did not. The books which record these events leave the question of their own authority absolutely untouched; and no distinction in kind is ever claimed for or by any of them over the rest, or indeed over any other writings.¹ But the plea is still vehemently urged by the adherents of the traditional schools generally, that the ordinary methods of historical inquiry are not applicable to the writings comprised in the Canon of the New Testament, and that the attempt so to apply them involves the tremendous risk of shattering the faith of Christendom. This plea has been met and refuted by a statement of the faith and theology of the Church of England, and by the demonstration that this faith and this theology do not rest on any events or incidents of history. If there be a danger to the faith of Christendom in the Divine righteousness, goodness, and love, the danger lies in reliance on a supposed historical foundation, which on examination is found to have no solidity. But it is well, and indeed it is necessary, to show that the true force of the theology of the Church of England is only then brought out when it is spiritually interpreted. The Eucharist is by common acknowledgment the most solemn act of Christian worship. Into the question of its relation to the rites of other religious systems which may be more ancient we are not called upon here to enter. The traditional belief binds it all up in the wrappings of supposed historical incidents, and makes the death of the Eternal Son an event which took place on a particular day and in a particular spot. Here, then, we have a crucial test. If on examination the incidents of the Gospel narratives become misty and shadowy, we do but show that the stripping away of their supposed historical vesture is the only possible means for bringing into clearer light whatever of life-giving and life-sustaining power this faith and theology may possess.

¹ The last sentences of the Apocalypse anathematise all who mutilate the text of that composite book by adding to or taking away any of the reports of visions contained in it; but it says nothing of any other books.

BOOK I

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FOUR GOSPELS

CHAPTER I

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FURNISHED BY THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

THE book commonly known under the title of the Acts of the Apostles relates, or professes to relate, the history of Christianity and of the Christian Church in the first stages of its growth. The subject is of the greatest possible moment, for, if the narrative of the Acts be found to be generally self-consistent, and if it be borne out by the statements of known contemporary writers, our confidence in its truthfulness will rest on a sure foundation. More than this, we shall be able to start with a presumption in favour of the books which tell us of the life and teaching of the great Master whose name was said to be borne by the new society. But if it shall be found that the picture of the Early Church drawn for us in the Acts of the Apostles is not borne out by facts otherwise ascertained, then not only is the book itself deprived of historical authority, but a strong suspicion is cast upon earlier documents (if they be earlier) which the book of Acts is supposed to confirm. The testing of this book of Acts is, therefore, a matter of supreme importance; and the power of testing it is furnished by the only undisputedly genuine writings contained in the Canon of the New Testament Scriptures.¹

¹ Substantially, the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians are allowed by universal consent to have been written by Paul; but it does not follow that the whole of these letters severally are also acknowledged by

The book of Acts gives a minute and circumstantial account of the history of the apostle Paul after his conversion, and of his relations to the rulers and members of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. We are told that after the incidents which are said to have brought about the sudden change in his life, he remained blind, without food or drink, for three days, after which he was baptized and then at once¹ entered on the task of pointing out the differences which at this time distinguished the Christians from the Jews. This work, begun, we may say, within a week after his conversion,² he carried on in the various synagogues of Damascus (ix. 20); and the work itself, whatever it was, differed in no respect from that of the other disciples. In this task many days³ were spent,—but not more, probably, than two or three months at furthest,—when a plot of the Jews to kill him led to his hurried escape from the city and to his first journey to Jerusalem after his conversion. Thus within a few weeks or months after the great change, Paul finds himself among the chief missionaries (apostles) of the body which held that the Messiah had

universal consent as coming from his hand. The Epistles have been largely interpolated; and the passages so inserted are in the eyes of many among the most important in the New Testament writings.

¹ εὐθέως, Acts ix. 20.

² He is said to have spent some days (ἡμέρας τινάς) with the disciples before he began to preach; but the word εὐθέως, coming immediately after, limits the time to a week, or at the utmost to a fortnight (ix. 19, 20).

³ ἡμέραι ἱκαναί (ix. 23). We shall find that in this instance there is a motive for so interpreting this phrase as to cover a period of three or more years. But the expression occurs in other passages in this book. Peter sojourns ἡμέρας ἱκανάς in the house of Simon the tanner (ix. 43). No one probably will suppose that he spent three years under his roof. In xviii. 11, Paul spends eighteen months in Corinth before he is brought up in the presence of the proconsul Gallio. After this he remains in Corinth ἡμέρας ἱκανάς (xviii. 18). Here the words mean, in any case, a time less than eighteen months, and probably mean five or six weeks at furthest. In Acts xxvii. 6 Paul embarks at the Lykian port Myra, and has a slow voyage ἐν ἱκαναῖς ἡμέραις by Cnidos and Crete; but this certainly does not mean that it took more than three years, or even eighteen months, to sail along half the southern coast of Asia Minor. The Septuagint translators use the phrase, in 1 Kings ii. 38, to denote a sojourn extended over three years. But it is clear that in Acts ix. 43, xxiii. 18, xxvii. 6, the phrase denotes a period of not more than a few weeks or months; and it seems somewhat rash to interpret it differently in ix. 23. The point, however, is of very little consequence.

already come, and risen to glory after his humiliation and passion. So short, indeed, had been the time, that, although there was constant communication between Jerusalem and Damascus, he was regarded by the disciples with a simple feeling of fear. They had heard nothing of his wonderful history, and they refused to believe that he was a disciple at all, until Barnabas vouched for his trustworthiness. Their suspicions being thus removed, Paul carried on with boldness and zeal the work which he had begun at Damascus, and remained going in and out at Jerusalem (ix. 28). The expression seems to point to missionary journeys in Judæa; and this supposition is fully borne out by the words put into Paul's mouth in his pleadings before Agrippa. Here (xxvi. 20) Paul says that, having first spoken at Damascus, he then preached at Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judæa. Throughout he is in perfect harmony with the apostolic or missionary body in the holy city; and there is no sign that he had any motives and aims which were not shared by them all. Of the Gentiles nothing is said here; but while Paul was at Tarsus, whither he had been conveyed to screen him from the plots of Hellenist Jews (ix. 29, 30), the ministry of Simon Peter was employed to make known to all that the blessings of the divine kingdom were designed not less for the Gentile than for the Jew.

Not long after the calling of Cornelius, Barnabas, having joined Paul at Tarsus, brings him to Antioch and returns with him to Jerusalem with contributions for those who might be suffering from the famine (xi. 30). This, then, is the second journey of Paul to Jerusalem after his conversion. Of this visit no further notice is taken; but after his return to Antioch (xiv. 26) we are for the first time informed of a controversy which is said to have roused no small discussion and questioning. By some who came from Judæa (and in Judæa we must include Jerusalem) the Christian society at Antioch was curtly informed that they could have no spiritual life and strength unless they submitted to circumcision after the manner of Moses. To deal with this question Paul is sent along with Barnabas and others to Jerusalem,

this being his third journey to the holy city after his conversion. Here he is received by the whole body of the apostles and elders (xv. 4), to whom he relates the result of his work among the Gentiles, and from whom he receives an invitation to attend a formal council, the first General Council of the Christian Church. In this solemn assembly Peter treats the matter as virtually foreclosed. He himself had been already chosen as the one who was to throw open the door of the divine kingdom to the Gentiles, and he now spoke of the covenant-ordinance of Judaism as a yoke which neither they nor their forefathers were able to bear. After this speech Paul and Barnabas again relate the results of work done by them among the Gentiles; and then the Council, having heard the judgement of James, passes a formal decree which releases Gentile converts from the obligations insisted upon by certain of the sect of the Pharisees (xv. 5). In all this there is complete harmony between Paul and the missionaries or apostles in Jerusalem. Peter uses language scarcely less strong and clear than that of Paul himself; and Paul, having appeared simply as ambassador from the society at Antioch, returns quietly to that city. Of Peter and his colleagues we hear no more. They become silent after the point at which they are brought into thorough agreement with Paul. Paul is not spoken of as actually an apostle or missionary; but in work, in motive, and in aim they are all one. There is not the faintest hint that either then or thereafter was there the least breach of concord between them.

But it so happens that Paul has also left us an account of his relations with the Christian Church in Jerusalem and with the chief men in it; and the circumstances under which it was drawn up invest it with the greatest importance, and (on the supposition that Paul was an honest and truth-speaking man) with supreme authority. The picture brought before us by his words stands out in astounding contrast indeed with that which we have been looking upon in the narrative of the Acts. Instead of appearing as the delegate of others, and hearing his own language from the lips of Peter or other missionaries, we see a solitary champion, fighting, single-handed, a

battle with a compact phalanx which looks upon him as little better than a seducer and a traitor. Instead of being united with them in motive and aim, he sees that he has one work to do, and that they are doing another. With the bitterness which a man can scarcely help feeling when he finds himself struggling with a force beyond his powers of resistance, he shows the depth of the antagonism which separates him from them. He is preaching one gospel, the good tidings of a love which embraces all men alike, be they Jew or Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; and they are preaching another, which, because it sets the Jew before or above others, is no gospel at all. As to this he is in no doubt himself, and he cannot allow any over whom he may have influence to remain in doubt. Were he himself to set bounds to the universality of his message, he should be a liar. It is not a question of high place, or power, or authority. If an angel from heaven come and say that there is in the divine mind preference or partiality for one man over another, let him be anathema. In truth, all the power and influence, which resided in the whole Judaic Christian body, had been, and was being, exercised against him. Were he seeking to please men, were he anxious to win the favour of those with whom he was connected by the strongest ties of education and association, his course would be clear. He would only have to say that all Gentiles must continue to bear the burden which, in the formal Council at Jerusalem, Peter is represented as saying that neither they nor their fathers had strength to carry, and all would be well. All the weight of their authority would then be on his side; but the penalty which he would have to pay would be that he could no longer call himself a slave of Christ (Gal. i. 10), a slave of the great Healer who is lifting up and taking away the sin of the whole universe.

He knows, however, that there is misrepresentation, deliberate misrepresentation, at work. He has thought and striven and spoken by himself, and it has been said that he had received from the missionaries at Jerusalem a charge to which it could scarcely be held that he had been faithful. He had displayed a spirit of

determined independence; and there had been suggestions, and more than suggestions, that he had been afraid to run counter to the feeling and opinion prevalent at Jerusalem. To do away with all these false impressions he must lay before his Galatian disciples the truth, and the whole truth. He will hold back nothing. He will show them the whole extent, as well as the nature, of his relations with the Church and its officers at Jerusalem; and he does this under the most solemn asseveration that he is speaking truthfully and with absolute sincerity. 'In the things which I am writing to you, behold, before God, I am not lying or false' (i. 20). He then goes on to tell his tale, when he had shown them first under what authority he had been writing and speaking. He had been preaching the gospel of the Eternal Son of God; but he had not received it from men, or from any human teaching, but from his direct revelation.¹ The thought of this charge given to himself from above carries him back to the time when his faith was bounded as that of the apostles or missionaries at Jerusalem was bounded still. The very contrast shows him that his life had been an education in which God was the teacher. He had been blind; but the manifestation of the divine love had been to him as the falling of scales from his eyes; but not even by the use of such a phrase does he give us any warrant for supposing that the great change had come, as it is said to have come, in the narrative of Acts (ix.). Nowhere does Paul himself make even the most distant allusion to the incidents which are there said to have preceded or accompanied his conversion. They are, rather, discredited by the words in which he speaks of God as being pleased to reveal

¹ This at once discredits the whole story of the intervention of Ananias (Acts ix. 10-17). Paul's distinct declaration is that on his conversion, or rather after the revelation or unveiling of the Son of God in himself, he would have nothing to do with flesh and blood (Gal. i. 16); and this excludes Ananias as well as all others. But the ministrations of Ananias were needed on account of Paul's helplessness; and this helplessness is the result of the bodily blindness caused by the light from heaven which had struck him to the earth on the journey to Damascus. If Ananias did not go to Paul, then these previous occurrences become unhistorical; and, further, Paul never makes the least reference to them in any of his letters. The narrative in the Acts is nothing more than the outward or concrete representation of a purely spiritual change.

his Son in himself, and of his resolution to sever himself from all human counsels.

When, then, the true nature of the divine kingdom had been made known to him, he did not hurry at once into the synagogues of Damascus, as he is said to have done in Acts. He preached to none; he disputed with none. More particularly he is careful to say that he did not go up to Jerusalem within a few weeks or a few months after the great change which had passed over him. He had no wish to see those who were apostles before him: he had no desire to ask their sanction for the course which he proposed to take. He must think over the work which God himself had given him to do; and to this end he went into Arabia (it matters little, or not at all, where this Arabia may be), and thence returned to Damascus, after how long a sojourn we cannot say. But he does distinctly say that three years had passed away before he undertook his first journey to Jerusalem after his conversion, and that he went with the purpose, not of preaching in the synagogues or of disputing with Hellenists, but of seeing Peter. With him he remained for fifteen days, and he left Jerusalem without seeing any other member of the apostolic body except James, the Master's brother. According to the narrative of Acts, he did not leave Jerusalem until the Christian society there had become familiarised with his presence. According to Paul himself, he remained unknown to them by face, during his sojourn in Syria and Cilicia, although they now knew the great spiritual change which had transformed his life (Gal. i. 23).

Such, according to Paul, were the circumstances of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion; and in every particular his story is irreconcilable with that of the Acts. If his tale be true, then that of the Acts is not historical.¹ But the main point

¹ Paul flatly contradicts the narrative of the Acts in the following particulars. He says that he did *not* preach to the Damascene Jews immediately on his conversion; and the Jews had no opportunity of expressing in his presence their astonishment at the change which had come over him. He did *not* at this time go up to Jerusalem. He did *not* make any attempts to introduce himself to the missioners there, and these missioners did *not* express any fear or suspicion

is that while the writer of the Acts garbles the history, he does so with a purpose. It is clear that, during the three years which had passed before he went to the holy city, Paul was becoming more and more aware of the gulf which was widening between himself and the other apostles, and that he was resolved to debate the matter at issue with Peter alone. In the letter to the Galatians Paul asserts his own independence: in Acts he is strictly subordinate. In the former he declares that he will take his own course: in the latter the reader is left to suppose that Paul was at all events ready to follow the directions of his colleagues, or rather of his superiors. The manifest purpose of the narrative of this first visit in Acts discredits it quite as much as do its perversions of the real facts.

Before Paul's next visit to Jerusalem fourteen more years had passed away.¹ But in the interval the Acts records another visit, when, with Barnabas, he went up with alms for the relief of sufferers from the famine in the time of Claudius. Of this visit Paul takes no notice; and there is no gap in his narrative into which it may be inserted. The plea has been urged that there was nothing in the visit to invest it with any special importance; but it cannot be maintained. The impression that he was acting, or had acted, in subordination to the apostles at Jerusalem, must before all things be removed; and if, in order to remove it, he went into the question of his relations to them, it is clear that his

of him, *nor* did Barnabas vouch for the reality of his conversion. Paul did *not* at Jerusalem address himself to the Jews, and the Jews did *not* seek to kill him. He was *not* taken to Cæsarea. He did *not* preach throughout the coasts of Judæa. He did *not* go from Palestine to Tarsus, and he was *not* brought back from Tarsus by Barnabas to Antioch. He was *not* sent with alms to Jerusalem during the famine said to have been foretold by Agabus (i.e. according to the chronology of Acts, about nine years after his conversion); and he was *not* set apart in the following year by 'certain prophets and teachers' for a joint mission with Barnabas to the Gentiles.

¹ Gal. ii. 1. This visit would, therefore, be more than seventeen years after his conversion. The time may be reduced by three years, if we choose to count the fourteen years as meaning from his conversion. It is a matter of little consequence; but the natural meaning of Paul's words seems to be that the fourteen years had passed since his return from his first journey to Jerusalem.

purpose would be entirely defeated unless he gave a complete account of all those relations. The omission of any visit, however insignificant in itself, would have laid him open to the retort that he had had opportunities of intercourse with the apostles, which he had not chosen to enumerate; and his mere silence would have been turned to his discredit. If he omits none, then his second visit in Acts (xi. 30) is unhistorical. It follows that Paul's second journey to Jerusalem is the third in the narrative of Acts, for no attempt has been made to identify it with any later visit. In Acts xv. 2 Paul and Barnabas are elected and sent as delegates of the church at Antioch. In his letter (Gal. ii. 2) he goes in obedience to a revelation, or, in other words, by no human appointment; and his companions are Barnabas and Titus, the latter of whom, for a reason which will soon become plain, is not here mentioned in Acts. But as before, in his purpose of subjecting Peter to examination, Paul has no intention of seeking a public reception or obtaining a public audience. Instead of being welcomed by the whole body of missionaries and elders, he confines himself to private conversations with those who were of chief repute, and to these¹ he gave an account of his own labours as an apostle or missionary, not as wishing to obtain their sanction for the gospel which he had preached to Gentiles, but simply as justifying himself for the discharge of a duty imposed on him directly from God. Then follows the recital of incidents, of which the narrative in Acts gives no inkling—incidents which had left on the apostle's mind memories so bitter, that in the expression of his feelings his language becomes involved and his grammar confused. His thoughts outrun his speech; but every word that he utters shows that the narrative in Acts of the first public reception and audience given to Paul and Barnabas, and of

¹ There is not the slightest room to doubt that the words ἀπεθέρην αὐτοῖς are merely explained by the following τοῖς δοκοῦσι. Nothing but the exigencies of a hopeless position would lead any to suppose that the αὐτοῖς refers to the formal reception of the first day, and the τοῖς δοκοῦσι, to private interviews on subsequent days. The private interviews were superfluous if everything had been debated and decided in previous public assemblies.

the subsequent Council with its formal debate and still more formal and solemn decree, is merely the result of a settled purpose to keep out of sight facts as disgraceful as they are painful, and to parade a fellow-feeling and harmony which never existed. Is it possible that, if the Council with its large-hearted utterances in debate, and the definite concessions of its decree, had been realities, Paul would know nothing about them, or, knowing them, should have said nothing about them? Such a supposition is the very acme of absurdity. Had Peter and James spoken as they are said to have spoken in this Council, and had the decrees been passed, then the terrible contention of which Paul goes on to speak could never have taken place. According to the narrative of Acts, the whole body of the church at Jerusalem, assembled in solemn council, had defined the obligations to be imposed on Gentile converts, the covenant rite of circumcision being expressly excluded from the number. Yet at this very time, when the decree was literally a thing only of yesterday, a violent attempt was made to enforce the rite upon a Gentile convert. Paul had been assuring his disciples that, if they submitted to circumcision, Christ should profit them nothing; and now here, in Jerusalem, after the passing of a decree which absolved them from this obligation, something like main force was used to get it carried out in the person of Paul's companion Titus. As he writes his letter to the Galatians, he cannot think of this attempt without a vehement indignation, which shows itself in the very construction, or misconstruction, of his sentences. He says indeed that the attempt failed; but he does not hesitate to speak of those who made it as false brethren, whose purpose it was to enslave every Gentile convert; and then, having declared that he would not yield to them even for an hour, he goes on to speak of the attitude of the apostles and chief men towards himself.

But in all that he says there is not the remotest reference either to the Council or to its decree; and without going further, we are justified in treating both the Council and the decree as unhistorical, if they should not rather be termed fictions with a

purpose. Had Paul heard the speech of Peter at that solemn assembly, he must, if he had never been made acquainted with the story of Cornelius, have asked for the meaning of the statement that he, Peter, had some years before been chosen by God as the instrument through whom the Gentiles should, on confessing their faith in Jesus as the Christ, be admitted to the full benefits of the Abrahamic covenant. He must, if he had known them, have pinned Peter to his own words before the household of Cornelius, and still more must he have pointed to the decree of the Council on which the ink was scarcely yet dry. But in his letter to the Galatians, he knows nothing of the story of Cornelius, nothing of the Council, nothing of its decree. The only possible inference is that all these were put together by the writer of the book for the one purpose which is betrayed throughout the whole of the narrative.

The words which follow are a strange comment indeed on that picture of Paul's perfect subordination, exhibited in the narrative of Acts, to the chief men of the Church in Jerusalem. In the narrative of the council, Peter declares plainly that he had learnt, years before, the absolute equality of Jew and Gentile in the sight of God (Acts xv. 8, 9). In the letter to the Galatians he has no more learnt this lesson than if the conversion of Cornelius had never taken place, and if he himself had had nothing to do with it. Of the alleged authority of the apostles Paul speaks only with a biting irony or sarcasm. They might be spoken of as men of repute (*οἱ δοκοῦντες*); but whether they seemed to be anything or not, it made no difference to him, as God accepts no man's person; and whatever they might appear, they imparted nothing to him, and offered him no help in his work. All that they saw was the distinction between the gospel of the circumcision and the gospel of the uncircumcision; and on the basis of this distinction they were willing to give him the right hand of fellowship, the understanding being that their paths were thenceforth to diverge. Paul with Barnabas was to deal with the Gentiles, while the whole apostolic or missionary body (whatever their number might be)

were to confine their ministry to the circumcision. Paul was to go on almost single-handed in the battle with human sin and misery everywhere, while their whole force was to be employed within the narrow limits of Jewry. It seems an amazing sequel to the command, that they should all of them go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Paul started with this conviction: the others seemingly never reached it.

In short, there is virtual unanimity throughout between Paul and the chiefs of the church at Jerusalem in the narrative of Acts: there is the widest divergence between them, whenever Paul speaks of them in his own letters, whether to the Galatians or the Corinthians. Nor is the difference superficial. It involves a fundamental distinction of principle. Once only it seems that, under the influence of Paul, Peter was induced to hold something like free communion with the Gentile Christians who had not submitted to the covenant rite of Judaism; and this occurred at Antioch some time (it may be months or years) after that visit to Jerusalem during which, according to Acts, the first General Council of the Church met and issued its decree. But how does Peter here behave? Is he here the man who spoke with all the freedom of Paul in the house of Cornelius, and who avowed the same convictions in the Council-chamber at Jerusalem? His liberalism at Antioch is a brief passing phase, and nothing more. He can eat with Gentiles so long as he is not under the eye of Jewish Christians from the holy city. As soon as some of these, armed apparently with the authority of James, present themselves at Antioch, he withdraws himself at once from their fellowship. The timidity of Peter clearly attests the strength of the Judaic exclusiveness among the Christians at Jerusalem; and this exclusiveness rests not less clearly on the supposed paramount need of circumcision for all who professed themselves believers in the gospel of the Son of God. Here then was Peter insisting on the closest theory of Jewish privilege, and here was Paul withstanding him to the face, because he stood self-condemned (Gal. ii. 11), but without making the slightest reference to Peter's declarations before Cornelius, or,

again, in the Council at Jerusalem. The decree of that Council had settled the question solemnly, in the name and under the professed sanction of the Holy Spirit, for all Gentile converts. The silence of Paul and his failure to avail himself of the benefits of that decree are complete proof, were other proof wanting, that the Council and its decree are both mythical.

It would, indeed, be wellnigh impossible to imagine any narrative more absolutely incredible than is that of the Acts, when compared with the genuine statements of Paul. In the letter to the Galatians we have a vehement dispute on the very question of the relation of the Gentiles to the society of the Judaic Christians at Jerusalem; and, throughout, Paul never gives a hint that the whole question had been formally discussed, and solemnly decided by the society gathered in a regular council, at which he had himself been present, and had recounted the results of his work among the Gentiles. Instead of taking his stand on the acts and decree of the Council, all that Paul can do is to assert his own principles and to demand that they shall be respected by Peter. He knows that the conduct of Peter has been both inconsistent and timid; and he charges him with this cowardice in language sufficiently clear. He allows that, as a Jew, Peter must regard the covenant rite of circumcision as of supreme importance: nevertheless Peter had at Antioch associated freely with Gentile Christians who were not circumcised; and, having so done, he withdraws into his old exclusiveness on the coming of 'certain from James.' He, therefore, confronts Peter with himself, while to the emissaries from Jerusalem he has nothing to say. Yet, according to the story in the Acts, Peter and these emissaries were alike bound by the decree of a Council, solemnly passed with their own approbation and vote, which defined the terms of communion for the Gentile Christians. That Paul should not have insisted on obedience to this decree, and have charged them with disobedience and treachery if they refused to obey it, is beyond all belief. He did not take this course, because he knew nothing of the Council or its decree; and he was

ignorant of them, simply because the Council had never been convened, and the decree had never been passed.

The result is not merely that the writer of Acts is discredited as a historian. The picture which he has drawn of the internal harmony of the Church vanishes into air. The fabric which he has taken pains to build up falls to the ground; and we see clearly that, if it had not been for Paul, the society of Judaic Christians at Jerusalem would have remained a mere Jewish sect, or more probably would have come to a speedy end. The apostles or missionaries of Jerusalem were assuredly all of one mind; but they were united in the resolution to allow no full communion to Gentile converts, except through the door of the covenant rite. If this point were not yielded, Paul might carry on his work by himself. As they could not hinder him, they would tolerate him, and, as tolerating him, they would clasp him by the hand; but beyond this they would not go (Gal. ii. 9). Even with this scant measure of fellowship Paul was content. It was no part of his purpose to provoke a quarrel or carry on a controversy with those of whom he speaks as pillar apostles or, at all events, as seeming pillars. Against these personally he never inveighs; but for those who act under them he has no indulgence. Throughout his whole narrative, however, this much is clear—that the apostles, or missionaries, of Jerusalem did what they could to counteract the work of Paul, although they would not in set terms condemn and denounce it. The emissaries who issued from the holy city came with letters of commendation from them; and although Paul undertook the journey to Jerusalem for the express purpose of winning their more active approval (Gal. ii. 2), he could obtain from them nothing beyond a cold assent to the continuance of his work among the Gentiles, while they confined their ministrations to the Jews or to such as were willing to submit to the covenant rite. In short, the narrative in Acts is contradicted in every particular by the narrative of Paul.

But we are still scarcely beyond the threshold of our inquiry, and each step discovers some fresh feature in the story, which the

writer of Acts wishes to pass off as the true version of the earliest stage in the history of the Christian Church. Not only had Peter in the formal Council declared that God had put no difference between Jew and Gentile (Acts xv. 9), and that there was no reason or excuse for laying upon the latter a yoke which had long been unbearable, but he had spoken of certain events at some previous time, with which he supposes all his hearers to be familiarly acquainted. 'Ye know,' he says, 'how that a good while ago, God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.' The marks of time in this book are often indefinite; but it is clearly implied that some years had passed since the events here referred to, whatever they were, had taken place. The longer the interval, the more wonderful becomes the fact which is immediately forced on our notice.

If Peter was justified in speaking of those events, and of his own part in them, then how is it possible to put the smallest trust in any part of the narrative of this Council or of the circumstances which led to it? If the great Searcher of hearts had obliterated all difference between Jew and Gentile, bestowing his Holy Spirit on the latter as on the former, then this fact must have been known to Paul as to all his other hearers. But, in this case, is it conceivable that Paul would have allowed himself to be elected as a delegate for the discussion of a question long since closed with the utmost solemnity? It is not credible. Rather, his letter to the Galatians is the proof, that when the 'certain men who came down from Judæa' declared that Gentile converts must submit to the covenant rite (Acts xv. 1), Paul would have started up at once with an indignant protest against the re-opening of a question settled years ago by the instrumentality of Peter himself. He must have denounced the treachery which thus bade defiance to lessons plainly taught by the Holy Spirit, whose sanction the Council claimed for its decree; and he must have refused to go to Jerusalem on any such unholy errand. The events to which Peter referred are astonishing indeed, and are heralded and accom-

panied by wonders on both sides. The church at Jerusalem was growing up in the tranquil conviction, not merely that circumcision was a matter of obligation upon all converts, but that the preaching of the gospel, whatever this might be, was to be confined to the Jews. That they had ever heard of the command which bade them go into all the world and bear the good news to all creatures there is not the faintest sign. The duty is first brought home to Peter by the vision vouchsafed to him while he tarried in the house of the tanner, Simon. According to the writer of Acts (x. 28), this vision was to disabuse his mind of a more than Mosaic exclusiveness. So strong was the distinction between clean and unclean, that in his opinion it was unlawful for a Jew to keep company with or to come to any one of any other nation. Without going further, we see at once that we are not reading a strictly historical narrative. Such isolation was altogether impracticable for the trafficking Hebrew; nor was it either enjoined upon or expected from them; and Peter had already been guilty of something approaching to a real infringement of law or custom by taking up his abode with a tanner.

Of the great importance of the lesson conveyed by these incidents, the double vision of Peter and Cornelius leaves us in no doubt at all. The vision said to be sent to Peter would seem to show that the distinction between clean and unclean meats was done away; but the alleged decree of the Council of Jerusalem takes no notice of this fact. So far, however, as it touches the difference between Jew and Gentile, the lesson taught by the vision is decisive. Peter is convinced by it that God is no respecter of persons, and that in every nation he who fears God and works righteousness is accepted with him. Paul never maintained anything beyond this; and the conviction thus impressed on the mind of Peter is shared also by all 'them of the circumcision' which believed, that is, by the whole Christian church at Jerusalem (Acts x. 45). The whole question was settled at once and for ever. Cornelius was nothing more than the first-fruits of the great harvest of Gentile Christians who were to be admitted to

all the privileges of the Abrahamic covenant without undergoing the covenant rite.

How, then, comes it about that of this wonderful story no one, when the Judaic emissaries reached Antioch years afterwards (Acts xv. 1), knows anything? It is not said even here that Paul had ever heard of it, and in his genuine letters he is beyond doubt absolutely ignorant of it. Is it possible that if he had learnt the lesson then, Peter could have behaved as he did behave when Paul withstood him to the face? Still more, is it credible that Paul could have treated the matter as a subject for controversy, when he could have appealed to a divine decision which Peter could not have dared to question? Cornelius himself is never named again; and the reference to his conversion, made by Peter in the Council (Acts xv. 7), goes for nothing, because Paul is represented as letting it pass without notice. Peter speaks of the believing Jews, that is, of the whole Christian Church at Jerusalem, as knowing both the story and its lessons; but, nevertheless, those of them who went down to Antioch ignored both the one and the other. The episode of Cornelius has no effect whatever; and with Paul a silence which can be the result only of ignorance is conclusive proof that the whole story is nothing more than a composition by the writer of Acts, or by some from whom he received it.

But in this story Paul, seemingly some years after the Council of Jerusalem, is represented (Acts xxii. 20) as referring to a narrative of incidents, which had occurred many years before that Council was held, and even before the conversion of Cornelius, and in which Paul had himself played a prominent part. According to this statement, Paul declares that he had not only been present at the trial of Stephen, but had approved and urged his tumultuary condemnation, and kept the clothes of those who carried out the sentence. In the circumstances which attended this event there was everything not merely to impress the memory but to kindle the affections of such a man as Paul. Whatever may have been Paul's failings, lack of generosity has never been supposed to be one of them. Stephen, according to the history

of the Acts, had been suddenly seized and charged before the Council or Sanhedrim with treating the Mosaic customs or law as things which were to be changed (Acts vi. 14). So deeply was his heart filled with the divine love, that all who looked upon him are said to have been struck with the superhuman beauty of his countenance; and in the defence which we are told that he was suffered to make, he showed at least that the whole training of the Jewish people, or of the thinkers among them, pointed to a purely spiritual faith, even if his words did not actually formulate the universalism said to have been avowed by Peter on the conversion of Cornelius, and set forth by Paul as the sum and substance of the Christian gospel. Paul had heard from Stephen words the memory of which in later days or years must have made his heart burn within him. But for all this he never makes any mention of Stephen. There could be no one for whose utterances he would have a more grateful remembrance; and yet he never notices him, even when (if these words be genuine) he speaks of himself as having beyond measure persecuted the Church of God. On the supposition that he had taken part in his trial and execution, his silence is as incredible as is his appearance at the Council at Jerusalem to debate a question which had been solemnly settled years before by a divine interposition. But if we are thus driven to ascribe his silence to ignorance, then the whole story of the Protomartyr crumbles away, and Stephen himself vanishes into mist. He is mentioned in no other part of the New Testament writings; and thus we have no contemporary evidence of his existence, while, if we look to the story of the trial, we are at once driven to ask how his speech has been preserved. He had been hurried to the judgment-seat without a moment for preparation; nor could the spectators have known that he would make any speech at all. The assertion that it was reported by Paul himself is a mere guess which is worth nothing. The inferences to be drawn from Stephen's defence are abundantly clear; but Paul not only never speaks of him, but declares emphatically that he received from neither flesh nor blood the gospel which it was his life's work to preach (Gal. i. 16).

But what are the characteristics of the speech in itself? The question carries us to a consideration of all the speeches found in the Acts, and involves an inquiry into which we cannot enter. Nor is there any need to do so.¹ For the speeches given in his history, Thucydides makes no claim beyond that of a general fidelity to the thoughts, and therefore in some measure to the words, of the actors. The speakers in the Acts not merely speak alike, but think alike. The minds of all move in the same groove. They employ the same arguments, and for the most part express them in the same words. Even when the clothing is not the same, the search for any essential differences under the outward form is vain. The broad conclusion that all the speeches in Acts are the composition of the author of the Acts has not been answered, and is in fact unanswerable. The speech of Stephen, in particular, is one which it is almost impossible to think that the accused could make on the spur of the moment; nor is it to be supposed that his hearers should be able to follow his spiritual interpretation of facts which had hitherto left on their minds a very different impression. There was, therefore, no alternative but to charge them openly, after a certain point, with wilful and determined blindness; and when this point was reached, the patience of his hearers was exhausted also. The tumultuous accusation is followed by a tumultuous condemnation; and as soon as the purpose of the tumult is attained the rioters again become orderly.

In short, we find ourselves wandering about in a marsh; and the experience of previous inquiries leaves us with little hope of finding any firm ground. Every statement is a tax on our powers of belief. The death of Stephen is followed (Acts viii. 1) by a persecution, which scatters the whole Christian community at Jerusalem, leaving the apostles only undisturbed. What other efforts for repressing opinion have ever left the leaders unmolested

¹ This task has been exhaustively accomplished by the author of the work entitled *Supernatural Religion*, vol. iii. part iv. It is useless to go into the linguistic analysis, unless we carry it out thoroughly. To do so would be only to reproduce what has been done already with a fulness and force to which substantially and practically no reply has been made.

and pressed only on their followers? In the sequel Peter goes to Samaria in order that the converts there made by Philip the deacon may receive the Holy Spirit; but to this mission, or to the conversion of the Ethiopian which follows it, Peter nowhere again makes any reference. Events are forgotten, seemingly, as soon as they have occurred.

But the narrative of Acts brings before us not merely certain wonderful incidents which compelled Peter himself to acknowledge that the love of God was all-embracing, and that in his sight there was and is no distinction of Jew or Gentile. It tells us also of special means provided for the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (if not for others) to smooth their work in converting all the nations. Not only are they to set about the work as one which might occupy the life of generations; but they are endowed with extraordinary powers which shall remove from their path difficulties which might otherwise be insurmountable. The curse of Babel had placed barriers between man and man: the blessing of Pentecost should undo the mischief.¹ In short, men shall be enabled to speak many languages, and some languages without having had the trouble of learning them; and in a moment, by the action of a divine power, a knot of ignorant Galileans are enabled to address Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretes, Arabians, and others, each in the articulate and grammatically constructed words of their several languages. No such power had been accorded to any before: no such power is known now. Nay, it never has been

¹ It is surely unnecessary to say, that, whatever be the antecedent probability or improbability of wonders, prodigies, signs, tokens, miracles (or whatever other names we choose to give them), we should never dream of believing a man who, having recounted some event of this kind, should be convicted of misrepresenting or falsifying ordinary matters of fact. On what ground, then, are we to accept the stories of sudden death inflicted by a word and a look, of prison doors flying open, of chains dropping off from the hands of captives, when we find that the writer who tells these tales gives an account of the relations of the two principal actors in the history which is utterly denied by one of those actors themselves? We know that the author of the Acts has not left us a true account of the Council of Jerusalem, where we can check him by the evidence of a contemporary writer; it is the veriest excess of credulity, if we accept his extraordinary narratives in which we cannot check him at all.

known or mentioned in any other book than in this of the Acts of the Apostles. Of any results produced by it we never hear. Some of those who received the gift are said to have written books included in the Canon of our New Testament writings; but those books are written by people who seem to have had no small difficulty in expressing their thoughts in the language which they use.

In truth, this gift or power of intelligibly speaking actual languages without having learnt them is nowhere mentioned except in a solitary chapter of the solitary book of the Acts: and yet this single and unsupported statement in an anonymous and non-contemporary writing has sufficed to convince wellnigh the whole Christian world, from the time of its composition to the present day, that this gift is strictly historical fact. But this statement is not only unsupported; it is contradicted and denied by the only contemporary witness who can be cited. That a gift of tongues, as it was called, was known at all events in some parts of the primitive Christian Church is beyond doubt; and Paul, who has left us an elaborate description of it, claims to have been endowed with it in pre-eminent measure. His account of it is, indeed, of inestimable value. It is the account of a zealot or enthusiast, if we choose to call him so; but his very enthusiasm adds to the weight of his evidence. The gift itself is, he tells us, one only of a large number which are all ranged under the one class of powers, signs, or wonders. Nor only this. These gifts are all spoken of as coming from the Spirit, the Spirit of God. The naming which follows (1 Cor. xii. 8-11) is most significant. Among them are faith, the word of wisdom, and the word of knowledge; and these are gifts which may be seen among us now as clearly as ever they were seen then. With these are joined gifts of healings, of works of powers (wrongly translated by the word 'miracles'), of prophecy or preaching, of the discerning of spirits. Last of all comes the mention of tongues, or kinds of tongues, and of the interpretation of them. The possession of all these gifts Paul unequivocally claims for himself; and for that of tongues he expressly thanks God that he can speak with them, and has spoken with them, more

abundantly than any others, be they who they might. But unless an exception be made for this one gift or power (and such an exception would imply its severest condemnation), he does not hint that any of them belong to what we speak of as the sensible or material world. He does not imply that the power exercised in the gifts of healing was a power of working visible wonders or prodigies. He does not say that it meant the healing of broken or paralysed bodily limbs or the curing of bodily diseases. He leaves it manifestly to be understood that the healing was the moral healing and spiritual strengthening of those who were bruised in heart and sick in soul. If we are to regard the epistles to the Philippians and to Timothy as genuine utterances of the apostle of the Gentiles, it is certain that these powers were not (or possibly could not be) exercised in the cases of Epaphroditos (Phil. ii. 27) or of Trophimos (2 Tim. iv. 20). If they were tried and failed, the fact of failure should have been mentioned; but there is not the slightest warrant for supposing that any such mere bodily cures were ever so much as looked for. The imagination, or it may be the lack of imagination, which characterised the seventy disciples, led them, on their return from the mission with which they are said to have been charged, to speak of the very devils as being subject to them in their Master's name (Luke x. 17). They meant, however, nothing less than this, that the most hateful of tempers, and the most vindictive of dispositions, had been brought into subjection and tamed by them so long as they worked in the spirit of the Great Teacher whose force was the force of love. It is to these triumphs of a divine love, to which (and to which alone) Paul refers when he asserts that the signs of an apostle had indeed been wrought among them, in all patience, in wonders and mighty deeds (2 Cor. xii. 12). Would there have been the least ground for this appeal, if one had been relieved of epilepsy, another of leprosy, another of bodily deafness or blindness, the spiritual conditions of all remaining unchanged? It is clear that the credentials to which Paul appealed were entirely spiritual, and that they were found in the moral changes, the spiritual cleansings and healings

wrought by his teaching and his life. The moral result of his labours won for Gregory, bishop of Neo-Cæsarea, the title of *Thaumaturgos*, or the wonder-worker; the fancy of the age soon invented and ascribed to him a multitude of sensible prodigies, and buried under a mass of fictions the true meaning of the name.

With the gift of tongues Paul, our only witness, deals happily far more fully and explicitly than with any other of the powers exercised by himself or by any one else. His own use of it constrains him to admit its reality, and he clearly does his best to appreciate such good as might come from it; but he has no hesitation in criticising the gift itself and passing his judgement upon it. He takes it along with the gift of prophecy: and prophecy is simply the preaching (predicating) or setting forth of anything. With this gift or power of preaching he compares and contrasts the kinds of tongues with a candour which is mercilessly severe. Both these gifts are used, or are supposed to be used, for the benefit of the whole Church, and therefore for the bettering of all mankind; and he insists pointedly that if any prophesy or teach, and there comes in one who believes not, or is unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and the secrets of his heart being thus made manifest, he worships God and reports that God is in them of a truth (1 Cor. xiv. 25). Everything here is clear and intelligible. The appeal is made straight from the heart and sense of one man to the heart and the sense of another. But what of the kinds of tongues? This is a gift which, apart from the good which possibly it may bring to him who is endowed with it, is, he declares (not without some vehemence), of not the slightest use in itself. It may, he admits (and without denying the reality of the gift he could not do otherwise), be made useful, if the man who has the gift will interpret what he says, or if he can find any one to do this work for him: but otherwise it is worse than worthless,—it is eminently mischievous, as fostering a confusion and disorder which made the Corinthian Church a scandal to the world without. No one but the speaker or the interpreter could extract any meaning from a series of unintelligible ravings; but

how or why the speaker or the interpreter should deserve to be trusted, Paul does not explain. The question involved a difficulty with which for obvious reasons he could not deal; but, short of handling this question, he did all that he possibly could to put the truth before his disciples. To bring the matter within our comprehension he has left absolutely nothing wanting. He has, in fact, little or no patience with the power or gift as exercised in public. 'I had rather,' he says, 'speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue' (1 Cor. xiv. 19). The inference is that the speaker in the tongues cannot always, or often, understand himself, and that the interpreter has to make an appeal from the senseless or frenzied zealot to the more sober thinker before he can reduce his cries to a form which may carry some meaning for the hearers generally. Nor does Paul stay even here. The gift may possibly (he scarcely affirms, though he does not in terms deny, this) edify the possessor, but it is sure to disgust strangers. 'If the whole church,' he asks, 'be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?' (1 Cor. xiv. 23.) Not a word more is needed. The judgement is absolutely decisive. Whatever the gift was, it was manifested in a mere utterance of strange and unintelligible sounds, not articulate, not belonging to any earthly language, sounds flowing from some uncontrollable excitement, of which Paul, while he says that he shared it himself, clearly saw the dangers. A grammatical and correct utterance of known or real languages it most certainly was not, and never pretended to be.

A more complete contradiction to the story of the day of Pentecost in Acts cannot possibly be imagined. There we have the distinct declaration that the disciples suddenly spoke correctly and intelligibly the dialects of Persians, Arabians, Greeks, Romans, and other peoples; and it is also perfectly clear that the power so given was not confined to the apostles. The whole Church was gathered together, and the number was at least the 120 mentioned

in the first chapter (Acts i. 15). The immediate consequence was a general amazement and wonder; but the feeling took two forms of expression. The fact of the bestowal of new powers of speech had no sooner been perceived than it was noised abroad, the result being that the crowd came together (Acts ii. 6). This crowd, we must suppose, consisted, in part at least, of the devout persons 'out of every nation under heaven,' mentioned in the preceding sentence, and probably of some others who received a different impression from what they heard. The devout foreigners from Phrygia, Pamphylia, Persia and the other countries, heard the disciples (so we are told) speak, each in his own tongue, the wonderful works of God. But in the crowd were others, who did not, or would not, recognise in these sounds the articulate utterances of their own languages. The former asked with wonder the meaning of the power which thus enabled a company of Galilæans to speak in languages of which thus far they had been ignorant. The latter declared positively that the speakers were filled through and through with new wine.

Without going further, one thing stands out as clear as the unclouded sun at noontide. Had the disciples been articulately speaking the languages of all the strangers there assembled, the reply to this charge of drunkenness must have taken the form of an indignant appeal to those who recognised in their utterances each his own native speech. Beyond all possibility of doubt, Peter must have bidden them, in common fairness and common justice, to stand forth and to say that sounds not intelligible to Jews of Jerusalem were really good Greek or good Latin, good Arabic or good Persian. Of any such course we have not a hint; or rather the sequel shows (if the whole story be not a fiction) that no such course could have been taken. When Peter obtains a hearing, he tells the men of Judæa and all who dwelt at Jerusalem, not that the disciples are beyond doubt possessed of the power of speaking languages of which thus far they had known not one word, but merely that 'these men are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.' He then goes on to

cite from the book of Joel some sentences which say nothing whatever about the bestowal of any such power, although they specify some manifestations of quite other sorts.

The words put into Peter's mouth virtually admit that the sounds produced in this assembly at Jerusalem were precisely like those of which Paul speaks as produced among the Christians of Corinth. In either case they were inarticulate, incoherent, and unintelligible; and the alleged power of speaking real languages without any previous acquaintance with them is thus proved beyond all question to have existed only in the imagination of the writer or writers of this anonymous book. The narrative which affirms the bestowal of this power is altogether untrue; and another link is added to the chain of evidence which proves the untrustworthiness of the whole work as a historical record. The Council at Jerusalem was never held: the decree ascribed to it was never passed. Of the conversion of Cornelius and of Peter's utterances after it Paul knew nothing; and the stories in the Acts relating his own conversion and the martyrdom of Stephen run counter to all that we receive from the one witness who really belongs to the time; and this witness, we need scarcely say, is Paul himself. As Paul's account of himself in his letter to the Galatians discredits the story of the intervention of Ananias, so his description of the power of tongues as exhibited in himself and in the church of Corinth shows the unhistorical character not only of the manifestations on the day of Pentecost, but of the picture of a golden age of faith which immediately follows.

According to this story there was a universal community of goods in the new society (Acts ii. 44, 45). But this narrative seems to be convicted of exaggeration (to say the least) by details given later on. In Acts ii. 44 the surrender of all private property is stated to be a condition of communion. Yet at a time when not one member of the Church retained any property in houses, lands, or moveable goods, the reply of Peter to Ananias for keeping back part of the purchase-moneys of land is that whilst it remained it was his own, and that even after it was

sold, the price was still in his own power—in other words, that the guilt lay not in departing from the practice of a community of goods, which was not treated as essential, but in representing the produce of the sale as less than it really was. The story itself is inherently incredible, and can have no claim on our belief as occurring in a book which we have seen to be wholly unhistorical. The whole society must have been gathered in one room, and must there have remained, with the exception of the young men who carried out the body of Ananias and buried it. Otherwise his wife could not have remained for three hours in ignorance, not only of his death but of his burial. She could not, of course, have come across the young men as they carried away the body of her husband. Thus in a small knot of people two instances of sudden death occurred in three hours,—the persons being landowners, and therefore not altogether insignificant. Yet no information is given of their deaths to any one in authority, and the bodies are carried away at once for burial. Nor is any notice taken of these events by the chief priests and rulers, who had here a golden opportunity for crushing men whom, according to the story, they both feared and hated. A previous chapter had related how for curing a lame man the apostles had been imprisoned and charged to speak no more in the name of the Christ; and in the immediate sequel the priests and rulers again lay hands on them for performing certain works which, if done, were unquestionably beneficial. But when after a miraculous or portentous deliverance from the prison the apostles are again brought before the Sanhedrim, not one word is said of this mysterious disappearance of persons scarcely of such little worth as to be thus unceremoniously passed by. Are we to suppose that Jerusalem was without any police at all? The mere celebration of the Eucharist sufficed, we are told, at a later time as a ground for charges of cannibalism. It is strange, therefore, that nothing should be said of an event, which they might, nay must, if they had known it, have characterised as a double murder, and which would certainly be investigated as such, if it took place in a

revival meeting at the present day. The narrative itself speaks of the events as striking terror into the hearts of the disciples, and as being freely talked of in the city (Acts v. 11). There was nothing to hinder this; but that the priests and rulers should give no heed to these reports is altogether beyond belief. The narrative is explained by its purpose. Peter had by his denial fallen lower than any of the apostles, except Judas; and his authority must be vindicated by some striking display of power which shall place him on a level even higher than that of the great apostle of the Gentiles.

It follows that on all historical grounds the writer of Acts and his work are alike discredited; and were he to relate nothing but what is known in the ordinary course of human things, his testimony must be set aside as worthless. But we have not said all, when we have said that his history goes into tatters at the touch. He not only ascribes to Paul a line of action which Paul emphatically repudiates for himself; but he sets down a series of incidents as attending and following his conversion of which Paul, to say the least, takes no notice whatever. These incidents are marvellous and portentous. They are prodigies, or miracles, or wonders. It matters not much by what name we describe them. They are, at all events, occurrences to which we should give credit only on the evidence of strictly contemporary witnesses, whose trustworthiness and accuracy have been tested and everywhere found good in the relating of ordinary matters. But it is just here that the author of Acts fails utterly. His book has been written with a purpose. This purpose made it necessary for him to distort all the events with which he had to deal, and to invent much which never took place at all. If, then, we can put no faith in him as a narrator of things of everyday life, what is to be said of the astounding multitude of extraordinary and in themselves incredible incidents with which his narrative is garnished at every step? It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, in comparison with the Acts of the Apostles and its exuberance of miraculous or wonder-stirring incidents, the Gospels are sober histories. We

are, therefore, wholly freed from any duty of examining all or any of the astounding occurrences which meet us in his pages at every turn. As works of history, the books of Chronicles in the Old Testament Canon and the Acts of the Apostles in that of the New stand on precisely the same level.

All that we need say further is that no clear evidence even of the existence of this book is found for more than a century and a half after the time when Paul abandoned the exclusiveness of Judaism for the task of preaching a gospel which knew no distinction of race or condition. Efforts innumerable have been made to discover references to this work in the epistles which bear the names of Clement, Barnabas, and Ignatius, in the Shepherd of Hermas and in the Canon of Muratori. But the authority of all these is, as we shall see later on, questionable, and some are certainly spurious. Clement assuredly needs not to be regarded as referring to Acts, when he speaks of seven imprisonments of the apostle of the Gentiles, and of his reaching the extremity of the west in his work as a missionary. The paragraph in the Canon of Muratori speaks of a book which contained the acts of all the apostles. Our book of Acts certainly does not contain them. The writer speaks of Luke as the author; but this, as well as the belief of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenæus, and others, proves only that towards the end of the second century the idea of the authorship of Luke was more or less widely spread. That the book, as it now stands, professes to be the continuation of a work written for the use of Theophilus (whatever or whoever this may be) is certain. But it is scarcely less certain that the prefaces to the third Synoptic Gospel and to the Acts do not come from the writer or writers of the books to which they are prefixed. That they both come from one and the same person is by no means unlikely; but even the supposition that this person was the author of Acts would prove nothing for their genuineness. The preface to the third Gospel makes the frank admission that many generations had passed away from the time of which it professes to treat. No one would speak now of a tradition coming

down from those who had been eye-witnesses from the beginning, if by this he was referring only to the days of George IV. Nor can anything be gained by laying stress on the sentence in the epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne, which speaks of the sufferers under persecution as praying for their tormentors, 'like Stephen, the perfect martyr, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' This prayer is certainly uttered by Stephen in the Acts; but Stephen is a historical personage, or he is not. If he be, then a knowledge of his trial and death might be gained from other sources besides the Acts; and only on the supposition that he was brought into being in the mind of the writer of the Acts, and in no other way, can we assert that the letter of the Gallic Churches implies a knowledge of the book. But the date of this epistle is about 177-8; and from this we could gather only that the book of the Acts was known then, while we should learn nothing more of the author or of the time when he wrote.

In truth, so long as we lack earlier evidence, it matters nothing whether ten or a thousand writers towards the close of the second century make distinct references to the book. The author is anonymous; and we have no means of learning who he was. The belief that it is written by Luke, and that Luke was a companion of Paul, had taken shape by the end of the second century; but we can scarcely venture to say that Paul knew anything about him. We certainly cannot do so except by affirming the genuineness of the letters to the Colossians and to Philemon and of the Pastoral Epistles also; but if we grant them to be genuine, they show only that a man named Luke was with Paul in Rome, but give no hint that he had travelled with the apostle, or had written a Gospel, or had composed anything like a memoir of Paul and his labours.¹ Had

¹ I have been able to give a few sentences only to this subject for which the author of the inquiry into *Supernatural Religion* admits that some chapters leave him but scant space. There are many points which I cannot notice at all. But of the sections in which the travelling companion of Paul speaks of himself and the apostle in the first person, a few words must be said. There is nothing whatever to show that these sections were written by Luke; and if they were, they do not in any way bear out the statements of the book on any matter of the least importance. These sections are full of the most minute details; but the

the author of Acts been really an intimate friend and the constant travelling companion of Paul, he must have known the apostle's mind as well as the circumstances of his history. As we have seen, he knows neither; and the epistle to the Galatians stands out in glaring contradiction with the whole narrative in Acts. According to Paul, his relations with the church at Jerusalem involved one constant and ceaseless battle; according to Acts, there was no battle at all. If we believe Paul, he never submitted himself to the leaders of the party of the circumcision: if we trust the writer of the Acts, he was never in opposition to them.¹ It is quite impossible that any close friend and trusted companion could have thus misunderstood and misrepresented his character and motives; and therefore, if Luke was his companion and friend, it follows conclusively that he was not the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Had he been sent, and had Paul intrusted

details are merely commonplace, and the narrative is out of all proportion with the rest of the story. The passages are seemingly extracts from a diary; but we know neither by whom they were written, nor the purpose for which they were embodied in the Acts.

¹ The history of the supposed Council of Jerusalem and its formal decree would suffice to show this; but the 'Acts' provides even for the instances of Paul's subordination to the missionaries or apostles of Jerusalem. He makes many journeys to Jerusalem to attend the feasts (xviii. 21, xix. 21, xx. 16, xxiv. 11, 18). He shaves his head at Kenchreai, because he was a Jew (xviii. 18). He complies with the request made to him to go through a Nazarite purification in the temple (xxi. 23). He circumcises Timothy (xvi. 1-3), although the story, strangely enough, says that they knew that his father was a Greek. This would be a reason for not circumcising him. The author should have said that they knew that his mother was a Jewess. But with still greater boldness (if we look to the letter to the Galatians) he speaks of Paul as invariably confining his ministrations to the Jews until they determinately reject him (xviii. 6); and to crown the picture, the Jews of Rome, when Paul calls them together, declare their utter ignorance of him some thirty years after his conversion. They had received no letters from Judæa about him, and certainly they had heard no harm of him, although they were well acquainted with the existence of the Christian society, which was for them a sect everywhere spoken against (xxviii. 22). But Paul's epistle to the Romans was evidently written before he had been at Rome; and after they had received it, he could not possibly be a stranger to them. It is simply incredible that on reaching Rome he should not go to the Christian Jews to whom he had written with so much affection, until the non-Christian Jews had rejected him. The Acts gives no hint that there had already long existed in Rome a society of believers or Christian Jews 'whose faith was spoken of through the whole world' (Rom. i. 8).

him with the task of defending the character of his life and work, it must surely be said that he could scarcely have betrayed his trust more effectually. Of those facts on which Paul lays most stress he takes no notice; but his narrative is full of incidents of the most momentous kind, of which Paul is absolutely ignorant. Nor is this all, for they are incidents which, if known to Paul, must have made his Epistle to the Galatians impossible. The question, in brief, is: Are we to believe Paul, or are we to give him the lie by putting faith in some unknown writer, or writers, of whom no mention is made till towards the close of the second century of the Christian era? We shall do so at the cost of giving credit to a narrative which has been convicted of untrustworthiness in all its stages, and which was put together with a set purpose, which Paul, if he wrote the letter to the Galatians, would have denounced with indignant reprobation. No professed history has been rejected on grounds more overwhelmingly conclusive.

CHAPTER II

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS IN THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES

IN the Acts of the Apostles we have the only professedly historical narrative of the New Testament Scriptures which we can submit to a comparison with genuine writings belonging to the time described in it and included in the same Canon of Scripture.¹ The results of this examination have been given in the preceding chapter. We have seen that the express statements of Paul not only invalidate the testimony of the writer of the Acts on all points which concern the apostle, but destroy all confidence in him when he relates any other events. When the author of Acts has been convicted of deliberately misrepresenting the great apostle of the Gentiles, the remainder of his narrative can scarcely be regarded as trustworthy, even if it were thoroughly self-consistent, thoroughly free from contradiction, and borne out by the direct or incidental statements of writers known to be contemporary with the events recorded. But as though the compiler of the Acts had been smitten by judicial blindness, the human and natural sequence, which to a certain extent characterises his narrative of Paul's labours, is lost in an atmosphere of incongruous and superfluous miracle, whenever he speaks of the acts of others. Even in the case of Paul the author cannot forego an opportunity for multiplying wonders. Handkerchiefs taken from his body

¹ We can also compare the Apocalypse with the Acts and with the letters of Paul: but the Apocalypse is not a narrative; and the little that needs to be said of it will be said further on.

heal diseases. But in other cases prodigies are still more wantonly introduced. Prison-doors fly open to set free prisoners who are brought back again the next day (Acts v. 26), or to deliver an apostle whose escape is followed by the slaughter of the keepers who had nothing to do with his flight. Yet the miracles or prodigies, of which there is no lack when they are not wanted, fail to deliver Stephen from the stones of the Jews, or James, the brother of John, from the sword of Herod. If we are to give any credit to such narratives as these, it is absurd to speak of the duty of examining the evidence for any historical narrative whatever. Sir Cornewall Lewis has shown that down to the Punic wars the history of Rome is full of contradictions, and that of the alleged chronicles, family inscriptions, and popular epics, from which it is said to have been compiled, we have no knowledge whatever. Yet the contradictions of early Roman history are certainly not greater than those which are brought to light on a comparison of the writings of Paul with the books of the New Testament Scriptures. In Paul, and in Paul alone (unless indeed we must make an exception for the authors of the Apocalypse) we have one who may be regarded as a strictly contemporary writer. We may therefore compare Paul with Thucydides; but we have to test the statements of both. Thus, when in the midst of a narrative in which the sequence is as thoroughly human as that of Napier's *Peninsular War* we come across an event (the Melian conference) which is treated ethically, we begin to doubt whether that event took place precisely as the historian has narrated it. When we see, further, that this event is the crisis of the war, and that the tide of Athenian victory, thus far constant, was now followed by an ebb, not less constant, of failures and disasters, we are at once led to examine the arguments urged by the Athenians in their controversy with the Melians. When, further, we find that these arguments are not at all those which the Athenians had been in the habit of maintaining, we begin to suspect that Thucydides has been tempted into making pictures; and the suspicion is converted into certainty when we compare the narrative with the history of

Herodotus and find that the Melian conference presents a turning-point precisely analogous to the attack of the Persians on Delphi. If, then, this rigid scrutiny is to be applied to historical narratives, when in the chain of political sequences we pass suddenly to an event treated ethically, what is to be said of narratives which display an almost incessant series of extraordinary and marvellous interferences, and fairly realise, as Cardinal Newman admitted that he longed to realise, the conditions of the *Arabian Nights* fiction?

We have no warrant, therefore, for giving credence to any one statement in the Acts on the authority of the writer himself. If we believe that Paul laboured at Antioch or at Ephesus, or journeyed through Asia Minor, we do so not because the author of the Acts tells us that he did, but because we have the facts from Paul himself. Hence the book known as the Acts in the New Testament Canon possesses no credit which can be transferred or extended to any other writings; and statements in the Gospels would, therefore, receive no corroboration, even if they were in harmony with statements in the Acts. But we shall see that they are not in harmony.

We need scarcely say, then, that from a book which, describing the events of a later time, is found to be throughout untrustworthy, no authority can be derived for writings which, like the Gospels, go back to a much earlier period. If the latter are to be credited, it must be because they are self-consistent, or borne out by the statements of contemporary writers, or in general agreement with the known history of the age. But the great traditional argument in favour of the popular belief has lain in the alleged testimony of twelve independent and incorruptible witnesses, who have no motive to deceive others and could not be deceived themselves, who persist in their testimony in the face of imprisonment, tortures, and death, and who by their labours sealed the doom of heathenism. Of these witnesses it is admitted that we have no knowledge, unless it be obtained from the Acts; and the Acts, apart from the fact of its lying discredited, does not even

profess to say anything except about three or four, and the main point connected with these is their flat refusal to preach to any but to Jews. We have seen that, in fact, we have not from this book the genuine testimony of any one of them. In its place we have the allegations of some unknown writer, who for his own purposes has deliberately misrepresented the character not only of Paul but of Peter also. In the Acts these two apostles alone have any substantive existence. The rest, with but one or two exceptions, are mere nameless shadows that flit across the scene, when their presence is needed at a council or for public worship. So far as this book is concerned, of their real lives and characters we know nothing; and the argument of Paley, which has led myriads to regard as a rock-built castle that which is a mere house of cards or of sand, receives its death-blow. It is a mere work of supererogation to carry the battle further by showing that these apostles, if they lived at all, lived in an atmosphere steeped in prejudice and credulity, that they knew nothing of a natural order, and saw in everything the signs of supernatural or miraculous, in other words, of arbitrary and capricious action.¹ It is, indeed, needless, for the purposes of the present argument, to show that they accepted stories of the most astonishing interferences with the sequence of phenomena as unconcernedly and as calmly as we should hear of a division in the House of Commons. We have no evidence which may legitimately satisfy us of their existence; far less can we pretend to the power of discerning their characteristic features.

But even if the idea of the testimony of a complete society of twelve men to certain extraordinary historical incidents (not, it must be remembered, to any spiritual truths) must be given up,

¹ Neither here, nor elsewhere, am I concerned with the question of the possibility or impossibility of what are commonly called miracles. The superstition of the ancient Jews generally is a plain fact, which must be weighed with the utmost seriousness. To ascribe to them our modes of judgement is merely ludicrous. The picture drawn of it in *Supernatural Religion*, Part I. ch. iv., is under-coloured. For men living in such a state, the historical faculty can scarcely be said to have any existence.

there still remains, it may be urged, the testimony of four independent evangelists, two of these being of the number of the twelve, while the writer of the second Gospel is stated to have been the personal attendant of Peter, and the author of the third a close and trusted companion of Paul. The reply is plain. Peter may have had a coadjutor, Mark, and Paul a coadjutor, Luke; but this does not show that that Mark and that that Luke wrote the two Gospels which bear their names. In fact, it is quite clear that the first three Gospels are founded on one or more common documents. Internal evidence proves that no one of the three writes from personal knowledge; and one of them admits the existence of a tradition extending over some generations before his own day (Luke i. 1-4). Nor, indeed, had Paul any personal knowledge of the life of Jesus to communicate to Luke, while Mark adds little to Matthew, or Matthew to Mark. The three Synoptic Gospels are manifestly not three independent narratives, but merely different versions flowing out of a common tradition; and what can such versions be worth?

Here, then, the subject divides into two streams. The matter of the fourth Gospel is substantially different from that of the other three. There is throughout it the stamp of distinct authorship except in the comparatively few passages which relate to events recorded in some or all of the other Gospels. We have then before us two inquiries,—one which must determine the time when the fourth Gospel was written, or, at all events, when it was first heard of; and another, which must settle whether the other Gospels are really three narratives or varying forms of one original tradition. If for the former it be proved that the time of composition could not be earlier than the middle of the second century and that it may be later, the testimony of one more witness is lost, for it could not in that case be the work of John the son of Zebedee. At best it can but exhibit the impression made by the teaching and conversation of John on the mind of some familiar disciple; and we are left, finally, to determine whether in the other Gospels we have the testimony of three several persons, each speaking, from

his own knowledge, of events which had occurred in his own lifetime, or from the information of men whom he knew to have taken part in these events and whose trustworthiness he had tested.

Now nothing is more certain than that any number of persons, speaking of events which they have seen, will describe each event in his own way. The mode of regarding them will vary. The turn of thought and language will be different in each case, and the narrative will give play to the associations and the prejudices, the wisdom or folly of the speaker or writer. There are, of course, certain cases in which we should expect them to use the same, or nearly the same, words. If they quote from a published document or proclamation, they will quote alike, in proportion to their general accuracy of thought. If they record a speech which they may have heard, these reports will agree in proportion to the strength and fidelity of their memory; but if we found that the letters of three or four correspondents of newspapers, describing the aspect of political affairs in Lisbon, Paris, or Vienna, contained here and there a sentence couched in precisely the same words, we should regard the circumstance as singular and suspicious. If we found two or three consecutive sentences in each exactly alike, we should conclude that all had copied from some common document, or that the original writing of one of them had been plagiarised by all the rest. If, in addition to this, we found event after event described, and question after question discussed in precisely the same phrases by each, we should dismiss the matter as too clear for an instant's thought. Yet this is the phenomenon which comes before us in the passages which are common to two or more of the four Gospels; such passages being, of course, far more numerous in those which have received the name of Synoptic Gospels, to distinguish them from the fourth. No fact could well be more momentous. The supplement to the fourth Gospel informs us that if all the unrecorded acts of Jesus were reported the world would not contain the books that should be written. Whatever this statement may be worth, it implies at all events a belief that the wealth of material stored up in the memory of the disciples (if not

committed to writing) was great; and we know that there were many Gospels, of some of which not even the names have come down to us. Yet the Synoptists (if this barbarous word must be used) relate but a few and for the most part the same events, often in precisely the same words. On this point no room is left for doubt. Down to the subtlest turns of thought and the nicest details of expression there is a substantial identity which proves that the narratives bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are in the main one and the same tale coloured with a few peculiar touches here and there according to the taste or judgement of the composers or copyists.

Thus, then, the witness of the four independent evangelists is reduced at once to the testimony of two narratives which must be authenticated, or in lack of authentication rejected, the one forming the nucleus of the Synoptic Gospels, the other supposed to exhibit the thoughts and convictions of the apostle John. In the case of the former the result is that we find ourselves in a strange labyrinth. That there was a story which underlies our Synoptic narratives is clear: but this very fact shows that, where other writers quote expressions or sentences found in one or more of our Synoptic Gospels, we cannot venture to say that they may not be quoted from earlier versions of the tradition, and that such quotations are, therefore, no necessary proof of the existence of our Gospels in their present shape at the time when the quotations were made. Much stress is laid on such alleged quotations and references in the writings attributed to Clement, Barnabas, and others, as establishing the fact that our Gospels were acknowledged as authoritative in the first century. The date of these writings must be ascertained before any such assertion can be made; but the quotations themselves may be derived from the sources accessible to, or used by, the evangelists. They are in almost every instance more or less different from the corresponding passages in our Gospels; and on the supposition that the matter of these portions is historical, they are just such traditional sayings as might easily be retained by oral transmission for many

generations. It is probably to this fact of oral transmission that some at least of the inconsistencies and contradictions of our Gospels are due. The tradition may have started, conceivably, with as many versions as there were hearers, who might impart to it each his own colouring; and until it has been committed to writing, the tendency to multiply variations is irresistible.

But when we say broadly that no direct references are made to the four Gospels of the Nicene Canon for a century and a half after the occurrence of the events which they are supposed to relate, it is not meant that no words found in the Gospels as we have them are to be found also in works belonging to the first two centuries of the Christian era. Passages may be quoted from the writings ascribed to the Roman Clement and others, which in spirit and substance agree with passages in our own Gospels; but unless the verbal agreement is exact in the sentences which are expressly given as quotations, it cannot be allowed that the quotations are made from our Gospels as we have them, and, therefore, that these Gospels were regarded as authoritative before the close of the first century. In many cases the differences are many and serious; in almost all of them they are considerable. The favourite means adopted by traditional critics to account for these differences is the assertion that the early Christian writers were in the habit of quoting from memory, and that so they often pieced together their sentences from passages scattered over many parts of our Gospels. It is, however, to say the least, a strange and perplexing thing that writers like Justin Martyr, who are thus loose in quoting from our Gospels (*i.e.* from certain writings of the New Testament Canon) are in the main accurate, not only in their quotations from, but in their references to, the passages which they cite from the writings of the Old Testament. The supposition that they had two sets of sacred books, one of which they treated as authoritative and from which they quoted exactly, while in their quotations from the other they patched their sentences together much as they chose, is obviously untenable and is indeed absurd. In the vastly larger number of instances the

divergence is so great that no one could ever have thought of referring these citations to our Gospels, had not this course been forced upon orthodox writers by the exigencies of their position. It is assumed that our Gospels are contemporary documents written by the persons whose names they bear: that they were known and received as such even before the close of the first century; and that in this fact we have a sufficient warranty for their trustworthiness. Of this fact anything is taken as evidence. The recurrence in early Christian books of such phrases as 'the last shall be first and the first last,' or 'many are called but few chosen,' or 'give to every one that asketh thee,' is at once asserted to be proof positive that the writer was referring to one or other of our Synoptic Gospels. It may be that the passages are given with quite a different context, or are manifestly meant to convey a very different meaning, or that a verbal agreement cannot be affirmed. But no difficulty is ever admitted on such grounds as these. The habit of quoting from memory accounts for and explains all these and all possible variations.

It is enough to repeat that these writers cannot legitimately be accused of being in the habit of citing from memory, loosely and without verification, the passages which they quote from the Old Testament writings; and therefore that there is no reason why they should thus systematically treat the writings of the New. But the question before us is of a wider range. The four Gospels which the Nicene Council distinguished as canonical are but a few out of a large class of such records, most of which have been lost and some of which are known only by name. How soon after the lifetime of the Great Teacher the harvest began to spring up we cannot say; but that some of them were taking shape, or had taken shape, not many years later than the life of the apostle Paul may be affirmed with tolerable safety. There is probably no reason for regarding the so-called preface to our third Gospel as part of the record to which it is prefixed;¹ but both that and the

¹ Whether this preface was, or was not, written by the compiler of the Gospel which follows, or of any part of it, is a question of very slight importance. It may,

prefatory verses of the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles set forth at least the knowledge of the writer that at the time when he wrote, the crop of Gospels was already a large one, and that the traditions embodied in them had existed for many generations. No one would speak of the religious teachers of the age immediately preceding his own as those who 'from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.' It is not easy to lay too much stress on these unconscious indications of time; but it does not follow that such prefatory sentences were written by the composer of the narratives which follow them. The Gospel which bears the name of Luke may be a century earlier than the preface attached to it; but this preface shows that at the time when it was written this Gospel was regarded as one of a class, and that other members of the class were looked upon as more or less authoritative. Now in the Synoptic Gospels there are very many passages between which there exists a close verbal agreement, though the words may not be precisely the same. If, then, in early Christian writings we have quotations professing to give the words of Jesus, but differing in any measure from the form which they have taken in any one or more of our Gospels, it is altogether inadmissible to infer that the citation is loosely made from memory from the latter. They may in fact be taken from other Gospels which have been lost.

If it be said that this fact, far from setting aside the value and authority of our Gospels, shows that a much larger number of Gospels were looked upon with reverence and trust, the answer is that, if our four Gospels do not form a class by themselves, the whole matter in dispute is from the traditional point of view conceded. If the early writers invariably, or almost invariably, quote

or it may not, be the work of the man who introduced the narratives of the nativity into a work which had begun with what is now the third chapter; or the author may have given its present shape to the whole Gospel. With perhaps not less likelihood it may come from some one who had nothing to do with the work to which he attached it. The history of the prefatory sentences of the fourth Gospel, which began with the record of the mission of John the Baptist, may be of a like kind. The real point of interest with reference to these prefaces lies in the question of literary morality connected with them.

from records differing from our own, how is this fact to be explained, when we have given up the theory of loose quotations from memory? The falsity and fallaciousness of this theory have been conclusively shown without travelling beyond our own Gospels. We have only to imagine that one or two of our three Synoptic records had been lost, and that there were found in some early writer a quotation, from some source unnamed, running thus, 'He said to them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways. Behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves.' According to the traditional way of dealing with such passages it would be declared that this was a citation from two passages in our first Synoptic (Matt. ix. 39 and x. 16). The quotation, however, reproduces literally Luke x. 2, 3, which we have supposed had been lost. So, again, we might find a quotation standing thus, 'Take heed to yourselves of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered up which shall not be revealed, and hid which shall not be known.' On the supposition that we had only the Gospel of Matthew these words would certainly be regarded as a free collocation of the two verses, xvi. 6, and x. 26; and yet the passage is found *verbatim* in Luke xii. 1, 2.

One or two such instances (and they may be multiplied indefinitely) are worth as much as a thousand for proving that even slight verbal variations are a sufficient reason for refusing to refer quotations in early Christian books to our Gospels, unless these Gospels were referred to with unmistakable clearness. But the Gospels are not referred to, and in almost all cases the verbal variations and even the differences of meaning are not slight. In truth, the precipitate haste with which passages like those in our Gospels are assumed to be taken from those Gospels is very wonderful. On the supposition that the Great Teacher really lived, that his teaching made a profound impression upon his hearers, and that he organised a society for the permanent carrying on of his work, would it not follow that his words would be handed

down by a real and widely spread tradition and be preserved in a multitude of records, crude and ill arranged, it may be, at first, but more carefully shaped out afterwards? His maxims and sayings would be a common property of the whole body of believers, so far as their memory might serve them; and it must not be forgotten that the references are in a large proportion to his words, and comparatively seldom to his acts or to any wonders wrought by him.

It follows that the citations made from his sayings cannot be held to prove more than the existence of the passages so cited. It does not follow that a reference to the parable of the sower and the seed proves that the document quoted contained any other of the parables ascribed to Jesus in our Gospels. Nothing less than the quotation of the whole record could prove that that record was one of our four Gospels, for apart from the fact that the citations of early Christian writers exhibit marked and striking variations from our Gospel texts, it is altogether impossible for us to determine the extent to which all those records were modified during the ages for which we have no manuscripts.¹ This is a fact which traditional critics commonly pass by with singular lightness, but which is really of supreme moment. That in this long interval some of the documents were interpolated is admitted, it may be said, without a dissentient voice; and these interpolations, it will probably be seen, were more serious than the most rigorous critics have thus far suspected. The changes effected during this time extended in some cases to the substitution of a whole book for another. Papias, as we shall see presently, gives an elaborate account of a Gospel which he ascribes to Mark. His description makes it certain that that Gospel was not the second of our Gospels. By unanimous admission the interpolator was at work long before the date of our oldest manuscripts; and in the absence of manuscripts, interpolations can be detected, in the last resort, only by the experience and the judgement of the critic. But the

¹ As to the extent of such modifications or corruptions of the text, see *Supernatural Religion*, i. 246, 247, 260, 267.

reasons for rejecting passages as thrust in are in almost all cases obvious, the chief among them being that the passages so thrust in do not agree with the context, and that they violently interrupt the course of the argument or narrative, which on their removal is seen to run on with perfect coherence. On the strength of two such interpolated passages (1 Cor. xi. 23-25, and xv. 3-9), it has been vehemently maintained that we have the authority of Paul for the principal incidents of the Gospel histories, for the institution of the Eucharist, for the visible or sensible Anastasis, and for the various Christophanies which are said to have followed it. We shall see further on that he could never have written these passages, and for any confirmation of the Gospel narratives we must, therefore, look elsewhere.

We may see at once how little can be built on citations in such writers as Justin Martyr or (the pseudo) Ignatius, even if the citations agree word for word with passages in the four Gospels; but of such verbal identity we have scarcely a single instance. How loose the agreement generally is will be made plain by the summary examination on which alone we can enter here, but which, as it so happens, is amply sufficient for our purpose. It is commonly supposed, or taken for granted, that a reference to our Gospels in the epistle ascribed to the Roman Clement would prove both the existence and the authority of those Gospels before the close of the first century of our era; and the assertion is confidently advanced that such a reference is made in the following sentences. Here the writer says: 'Remember the words of our Master Jesus, for he said, "Woe to that man; it were well for him if he had not been born than that he should make one of my chosen to stumble. It were better for him that a millstone should be fastened on him and he be drowned in the sea than that he should scandalise one of my little ones."''

Now, there is no passage in either of our Synoptics which exhibits anything like this quotation in its integrity. The nearest approach that can be found to it is furnished by taking some of the words said to have been spoken by Jesus in reference to the

betrayal of Judas (Matt. xxvi. 24), and piecing them on with some of his expressions on setting up the little child in the midst of the disciples (Matt. xviii. 6). Whether in this and the other passages in which the words of Jesus are cited the Clementine writer is quoting from an unknown record or reproducing merely oral tradition is a question of no great moment. In either case he prefers an unknown record or a tradition merely oral to the versions which have come down to us, and so shows that the latter had for him no authority, even if he was aware of their existence. But we do not know when this so-called epistle of Clement was written. It bears no name, and professes to come simply from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth. According to Eusebius, Clement became bishop of Rome A.D. 91, and died nine years later. If so, it would seem to follow that he was not the author of the epistle, which furnishes internal evidence for a much later date. It refers the Corinthians to the letters addressed to them by Paul 'in the beginning of the gospel' (a phrase which could not well be applied to letters written only some thirty years, even if so long, before), and speaks of 'the most ancient and steadfast church of the Corinthians,' which would be absurd if that church had existed only for one generation. It refers also to the book of Judith, which is supposed to belong to the year 117-118; and in that case the epistle of Clement cannot be earlier than 120-125. The point is one of little moment, for, whatever be its age, it cannot be shown that the writer was acquainted with our Gospels, and these Gospels can therefore derive no authority from his letter.

An appeal of the like sort is made to the epistle ascribed to Barnabas, the colleague of the apostle Paul. In this writing we have the words, 'Let us beware lest we be found, as it is written, Many called, few chosen.' This is taken to be a direct reference to our Matthew and an acknowledgement of the authority of that Gospel. But the expression is just one of those which, on the supposition that it comes from the Great Teacher, would be the common property of all who heard him utter it; and it is a very

singular thing, that, although it occurs twice in our first Synoptic (xx. 16, xxii. 14), in neither case has it the least connexion with the context. In the one case it is attached to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, in which all who are called receive an equal recompense, or, in other words, all are chosen; and in the other to the parable of the wedding guests, in which one only of the called is rejected. The phrase is clearly dragged in, as many another has been dragged in, because some scribe had written it on the margin, and another could not resist the temptation of inserting the gloss in the text. It is found only in later MSS. in Matthew xx. 16, and not at all in either Mark or Luke, as we have them. The other passages cited from the epistle of Barnabas are equally inconclusive; and the epistle itself cannot be older than that which is ascribed to Clement. Neither here, nor in the so-called Shepherd of Hermas have we the least evidence of the existence of our canonical Gospels in the shape in which we have them now.

The quotations of passages resembling others in our Gospels, found in the epistles ascribed to Ignatius of Antioch, are not a whit more conclusive; but the epistles themselves lie under such a cloud of suspicion that their value for any purposes of evidence becomes in any case worthless. At best, if the fact of any such reference could be established, it would only prove that the Gospel referred to was in existence during the reign of Trajan; but such references cannot be found, and the whole Ignatian literature must be set aside as a vast mountain of forgery. Fifteen letters in all bear his name. Seven only are mentioned by Eusebius; and the remainder are therefore, it would seem, universally rejected as spurious. But the process of winnowing does not stop here. These seven letters exist in two versions, a long and a short one. The long one is rejected with scarcely a dissentient voice, as containing nothing more than the matter of the shorter version swollen out by multitudes of interpolations. That the shorter version itself was full of interpolated matter seemed to be proved, when in 1845 Dr. Cureton published a still shorter

Syrian version of the epistles to the Ephesians, to the Romans, and to Polycarp. It was natural that critics who, on the supposed authority of Eusebius, still upheld the genuineness of the shorter Greek version, should regard the Syrian version as an epitome of that version; but, in truth, there is no evidence for this. The letters read altogether more clearly, coherently, and consecutively, than in their Greek dress; but it is noteworthy that those passages which chiefly brought the epistles into suspicion are not found in the Syrian version at all, and that the mss. of this version are older by some centuries than the Greek. This proves only that in the Syrian we have the earliest form of the Ignatian literature which swelled out afterwards into so large a mass. The problem which lies beneath it remains unchanged. Of these three, as of all the other letters, the same account is given. Is that account worthy of the least credit? In any shape these letters are pitiable specimens of ignorance, superstition, and intellectual degradation; but this does not prove them to be false. The difficulty lies in the tale that they were written on his journey, by land, from Antioch to Rome, where he was to be thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre. According to the complaint of the martyr he was treated with terrible cruelty. 'From Syria even to Rome,' he says, 'I fight with wild beasts, by sea and by land, by night and by day, being bound amongst ten leopards, which are the band of soldiers who, even receiving benefits, become worse,' in other words, are rendered more exacting by bribes. But if it be so, whence came the time and the opportunity for writing these letters, and for the interviews which he admits that he had with his friends at the several stages of his journey? Still more, how came it about that these guards should allow a man condemned to death for professing himself a Christian to write letters enforcing the very doctrines which had brought down his sentence upon him? The story of the Roman journey is altogether incredible. There are, however, good reasons for saying that his martyrdom took place at Antioch itself, after the panic caused by the great earthquake in the year 115. But in this case not one of the epistles is genuine; and therefore

even if they contained direct references to any of our Gospels, those references would be worthless, as not belonging to the age to which they are assigned; but no such references are forthcoming. Of the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, which deals with the martyrdom of Ignatius, it is enough to say that it speaks not only of his journey to Rome (which we have seen to be incredible) but also of the spurious letters not found in the Syrian version. These are, therefore, older documents than the latter, which are meant to be regarded as the earlier. Nor is this all. The letter in one chapter speaks of Ignatius as dead, holding him up, like Paul and the other apostles, as examples of patience, and in a later one treats him as living, and asks how he and they who are with him are faring. The epistle of Polycarp is, therefore, spurious; and its testimony to the existence of our Gospels, if any such could be found, would be of no value. Thus far, we have met with no evidence which supports the theory that our Synoptic Gospels were known to any who lived and wrote in the first century of our era or the earlier half of the second.

The writings of Justin Martyr are of greater importance. It is true, indeed, that his authority is simply that of a man speaking in the latter half of the second century; but he is one who speaks deliberately in answer to a serious charge, making his citations with the care needed, not so much to insure his own acquittal (for about this he was probably indifferent) as to justify his faith in the sight of his judges. He is, therefore, we might suppose, the last man against whom traditional critics would make charges of loose citations from memory, and of the patching together of passages which occur in quite different connexions in our Gospels. Of the date of his first, or larger, Apology, there is happily no doubt. The so-called second Apology has little value or interest. His martyrdom took place in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, about A.D. 166-167; and his Apology speaks of the birth of Jesus as having taken place a century and a half before the time at which he was writing. As we might expect, this treatise is full of Scriptural citations; and by Scripture Justin means

strictly the writings of the Old Testament, to which his references are generally exact. Of references to the sayings of Jesus, and to the supposed incidents of his history, the larger Apology and the Dialogue with Tryphon furnish considerably more than a hundred. If of these it may be broadly said that not one agrees exactly with the text of our Gospels, further evidence cannot be needed to prove that the latter were not then in existence, or, if they were, that Justin deliberately preferred others to them—in other words, that they had at the time no authority. That he had a Gospel from which he claims to make precise quotations is indisputable, and of this Gospel he repeatedly speaks under the title of Memoirs of the Apostles, meaning by this not recollections of their labours, but records drawn up by them of the life and teaching of the Great Master. But although he speaks of these Memoirs as the work of the Apostles, it is only in a single instance that he mentions the name of any one as having written any of them. This instance is that of the Apocalypse, which he ascribes to John as ‘one who prophesied by a revelation made to him;’¹ but the fact that he only names him thus, shows that he had no Gospel which he attributed to the same writer. As to the Gospel history followed by Justin, it may be said that it differs more or less in every particular from the versions preserved to us in our canonical Gospels, just as these differ from one another. The genealogy of Jesus is traced through Mary, not through Joseph. The angel bids Mary call her child Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins—a declaration which is not made in our third Gospel, but which in the first is addressed in the vision to Joseph. Her child is born not in a stable but in a cave; and Justin, arguing from old prophecy that he must be so born, shows indisputably that he had this statement in the Gospel which he followed. When Jesus is baptized, a fire is kindled in Jordan, and the voice from heaven proclaims, ‘Thou art my beloved Son: this day have I begotten thee’—a citation which Justin certainly would not have made, had he had before him the version given in our first Synoptic (iii. 17),

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, i. 298.

which makes his Sonship eternal instead of dating it from the moment of his baptism. Discrepancies of the like sort run through his whole narrative. When Jesus is arrested on the Mount of Olives, Justin says that 'there was not even a single man to run to his help as a guiltless person'—a statement which cannot be reconciled with the story of Peter and Malchus. According to our Gospels, the disciples forsake their Master and fly before his crucifixion: according to Justin they do so after that event, and the whole body of the apostles deny him as plainly as Peter. Here, if anywhere, Justin would be careful to state nothing for which he had not ample authority. The fact that he makes this statement shows that he was following not the versions of our canonical Gospels, but another which differed from them indefinitely. In our first Synoptic (xxvii. 62-66) we have a story of the Sanhedrim bribing the Roman soldiers to tell the governor that the disciples of Jesus had stolen his body while they, the guards, were sleeping at their post. Justin has quite another tale, that the Jews selected and sent forth from Jerusalem throughout the land chosen men, saying that 'the atheistic heresy of the Christians had arisen from a certain Jesus, a Galilæan impostor, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb where he had been laid when he was unloosed from the cross, and they now deceive men, saying that he has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven.' There is not a word here about the Roman soldiers; but there can be no doubt, as Justin tells the story twice, that he found it in the *Memoirs of the Apostles*, and without going further, we can see how easily a vast crop of stories might, or rather inevitably would, spring up from the mythical matter which was taking shape in one form or another. The story of Justin is not the same story as that of the guards of Pilate in our first Gospel; and by no process can the two be brought into agreement. But there is no reason why there should not be twenty different versions of a tale which started from the notion of stealing from the tomb the body of one who had been taken down from the cross. The crowd of evangelists mentioned in the

preface to our third Gospel was not bound to adhere to one version of the incidents rather than to another. But the astounding fact remains that, amidst the multitude of references to the teaching of Jesus and the alleged incidents of his life, there are scarcely more than one or two instances in which we can say that there is a verbal agreement between the text of Justin's citations from the Memoirs of the Apostles and the text of our canonical Gospels. Even when there is an approach to verbal agreement, we have seen that the circumstance proves, and can prove, nothing, when the citation in question refers to a saying of Jesus which may be historical. All such sayings became the common property of all who heard them, and might reappear, word for word, in a dozen different records.

Three consecutive chapters (xv.-xvii.) in the first Apology of Justin are taken up with an exposition of the fundamental teaching of Jesus, in other words, with utterances preserved to us in our first and third Synoptics, in the sermons said to have been delivered from the mount and on the plain. There is undeniably a substantial agreement with both. The spirit is throughout the same, and to a certain extent there is a likeness of language. All these citations Justin professes to make from the Memoirs of the Apostles; and it is vehemently contended by theologians of the traditional schools that the Memoirs are thus proved to be identical with our canonical Gospels. Yet what are the facts? The passages in Justin are clearly continuous, except where he himself shows that he has left one passage and gone to another. It follows that the passages which he cites continuously were found continuously in the Gospel of which he was making use; and the result is this, that, if it be assumed that he was quoting from our Gospels, we have to admit that he picked out not only from the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain but from other parts of our Synoptics a number of passages which he dovetails into a coherent whole, showing not the least regard to the order in which he finds them, frequently altering their meaning, more frequently setting at naught their context, and in almost

every single instance misquoting more or less seriously the passages themselves,—and yet, while he does this, claiming in the clearest and most formal manner to be quoting accurately.

To any who do not start with the foregone conclusion that Justin must have had our Gospels before him, because to allow that he had not would damage the cause of the traditional theology, such conduct as this is really incredible. Justin nowhere names our Gospels, and nowhere quotes them. It becomes a sheer assumption, therefore, to affirm that he knew anything about them, or even that they were then in existence in their present form. We have already seen from an inspection of our Synoptic Gospels¹ how dangerous and how worthless are attempts to account for differences of words, of meanings, and of context on the hypothesis that the writer was quoting loosely and inexactly from memory, and so pieced together clauses and sentences which in our Gospels appear in different places and with different connexions. The conclusion with regard to Justin is obvious and inevitable. He does not quote from our Gospels; therefore, he quotes from a different Gospel; but it is no part of our duty to determine the source of his citations. He calls the records which he quotes *Memoirs of the Apostles*. These *Memoirs* may, or may not, have been the same as the Gospel of the Hebrews, or any one of the many others which have been altogether lost. The exactitude of his citations we have no right whatever to call into question. His language is invariably that of a man who knows what he is about; and it is impossible to doubt his truth when he declares in some instances that he quotes the words of Jesus, and then goes on to make his comments and to draw his own conclusions from them.

Hegesippos, a contemporary of Justin, is a man of some note, as being the first historian of the Christian Church. Coming to Rome during the pontificate of Anicetus (Aniketos), he composed five books of *Memoirs*, in one of which he speaks of Eleutheros as then Bishop of Rome. This book, therefore, must have been

¹ See p. 69 *et seq.*

written after the year 177 of our era. Eusebius speaks in high terms of his authority as a contemporary with the first successors of the apostles. The expression is scarcely accurate. The deaths of the apostles, or missionaries, named by the Great Teacher could scarcely have taken place more than forty years after his own; and if we give another forty years to those whom they themselves elected, this would bring us to the year 110, when Hegesippos, if born, could have been only a child. He would, however, be only one generation later; but this would give no value to his testimony as to the existence and the genuineness of our canonical Gospels, unless this testimony should be borne out by that of writers older than himself. Unfortunately his work is lost; and we have only some extracts which have been preserved to us by Eusebius, together with one other fragment. But Eusebius confesses the great anxiety which he had to bring together all attainable evidence for the antiquity and authority of our canonical Gospels; and if he could have found any such evidence in the pages of Hegesippos he would beyond all doubt have embodied it in his own work. His silence is proof that they furnished none; but Eusebius makes no attempt to hide the fact that Hegesippos made use of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, of which something must be said by and by. Hegesippos was a Christian of Palestine, and his Christianity had a very strong Jewish tinge. He speaks not of Peter or John, but of James, as being the chief of the apostles; and his account of James shows how small was the difference between him and those of the circumcision. He declares that after reaching Rome he put together the records of the history of the Roman Church to the time of Eleutheros; but with every succession, he assures us, and in every city, 'that prevails, which the Law and the Prophets and the Master enjoin.' The only written authority which he recognises is the Old Testament Scripture. Apart from this, he holds to the 'infallible tradition of the apostolic preaching.' But this is an oral tradition; and of any Canon of New Testament Scriptures, or even of any gathering of apostolic epistles, he clearly knows nothing. Attempts have,

nevertheless, been made to prove that Hegesippos was not only acquainted with our Synoptic Gospels, but that he also quotes them. The proof is as shadowy as in the case of Justin. Speaking of the martyrdom of James, Hegesippos says that, like Jesus and like Stephen, he prayed for his murderers, and gives his prayer in the words, 'I beseech thee, Lord God Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' This agrees exactly neither with the prayer of Stephen nor with that of Jesus; but we have seen that the prayer of Jesus, on the supposition that it was historical, would become the common property of all who heard it, and might be recorded in a multitude of writings, some of which might even owe nothing to each other. From Hegesippos, therefore, we get no evidence of the existence of our canonical Gospels in his own day.

A contemporary of Hegesippos, and possibly a fellow-martyr with Justin, is Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, whose death is said to have taken place about 164-167. As Hegesippos is our first ecclesiastical historian, so Papias is the first who speaks of Gospels written by Matthew and Mark; and the leap is made to the conclusion that these Gospels are identical with those which bear these names in our Canon. Unlike Justin, he cares little for written records in comparison with oral tradition. His great wish, he tells us, was to know 'what Andrew or what Peter said, or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or any other of the disciples of the Master, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Master, say, for I held that what was to be gotten from books did not so profit me as that which came from the living and abiding voice.' If, then, he had met with our canonical Gospels, or with any others, it is quite clear that he had no special regard for them, and that the idea of their authority never passed across his mind. The idea that he knew anything of a Canon of New Testament Scriptures is merely ridiculous. Whether the presbyter John, who is named after the unknown Aristion, was the Evangelist or some other person, is a question of not much moment. Papias does not say that he heard either of them himself, and indeed it is

scarcely possible that a man who was living in the time of Marcus Aurelius could have been a hearer of any one of the apostles. Whoever he may have been, Papias in his 'Exposition of the Master's sayings' (or oracles, *Logia*) tells us that this presbyter spoke of Mark as one who 'having become an interpreter of Peter, wrote down exactly what he remembered, though he did not set down in order the things which the Christ said or did, for he never heard the Master nor followed him, but later on followed Peter, who adapted his teachings to the wants of his hearers, but had no intention of making any set exposition of the Master's sayings. Mark, therefore, failed of nothing in what he put down from memory, writing with the sole purpose of omitting nothing that he heard from Peter and of making no false statements.' This is in the highest degree important; and obviously the question turns on the identity of this Gospel of Mark with the one which bears this name in our Canon. Later writers are found whose words agree more or less with those of Papias; but it must be remembered that they are all later writers, and therefore that they may be telling us merely what they may have learnt from Papias, with the variations which must come with the passing of the tradition from one hand to another. In what sense did Papias speak of Mark as an interpreter of Peter? Does he mean that Mark translated a treatise of Peter from Aramaic into Greek, or that he wrote as a secretary to the dictation of Peter? Whatever he wrote, it is clear, according to Papias, that he did not draw up any consecutive record of the acts or the discourses or the sayings of Jesus. This statement is of supreme importance, for the later writers who notice this matter bring in elements of confusion and uncertainty. Irenæus¹ says simply that after the death of Peter, Mark set down in writing the substance of the preaching of the apostle. Clement of Alexandria, cited by Eusebius,² tells us that many who had heard Peter preach in Rome requested Mark to write down what he had spoken, and that he drew up his Gospel accordingly. Peter, he adds, on hearing this, said nothing in the

¹ *Adv. Hær.* iii. 1. 1; Eusebius, *H. E.* v. 8.

² *H. E.* vi. 14.

way of either encouraging or hindering the work. That Peter should be thus neutral and passive seems strange, when we remember that he was one of those who, we are told, had been solemnly charged to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The version which Eusebius himself gives of the matter¹ presents Peter in quite another light. With his usual inflated speech, he tells us that Peter's hearers at Rome were so struck by the effulgence of his piety that they could not content themselves merely with his unwritten teaching, but insisted that Mark should reduce this teaching to writing. It might be supposed that any one of the hearers who had a good memory would be as equal to the task as Mark. But the rest of the story, as told by Eusebius, carries us into the regions of wonder. Peter learns what Mark was doing, or had done, not by means of ordinary speech, but by the revealing of the Holy Spirit, and is so delighted that he sanctioned the reading of Mark's book in the churches. Why he should not himself have done the work of which he thus heartily approved we are left to wonder, especially as even to a slow scribe it would hardly have furnished occupation for more than eight or ten days.¹ But, whatever the task may have been, we must not for a moment forget that it was nothing more than a record of the preaching of Peter, and neither was, nor pretended to be, a narrative of the life and teaching of the Great Master. It is equally certain, therefore, without going further, that the book written by Mark was not the second of our four canonical Gospels, and was not an orderly narrative.

But, although it is in no way essential to our purpose, we may yet note that Mark, according to all these stories, wrote as one saturated with Petrine influence; and our Gospel bearing Mark's name exhibits not a sign or trace of such influence. It takes no notice of Peter's walking on the sea; of his declaration that the Master whom he followed was the Christ; of the reply which

¹ This supposition would probably hold good, whatever the Gospel might be. Few, probably, of the evangelic narratives which were multiplied in the second century of our era much exceeded the length of our first Synoptic.

spoke of him as blessed; of the further declaration that he was Peter, on whom the Church should be built; of the finding of the tribute-money in the mouth of the fish; of the assurance that Jesus had prayed for him that his faith might not fail. In short, our first Synoptic is immeasurably more Petrine than is the second. But in no sense is our second Synoptic an irregular narrative, without plan and without order, of the life and teaching of Jesus. It is short and concise, no doubt; but it has all the appearance of an epitome done with great skill by a thorough master of such work. It has been well said that this Gospel exhibits 'every characteristic of artistic and orderly arrangement, from the striking introduction by the prophetic voice crying in the wilderness to the solemn close of the marvellous history.' In no one respect, therefore, does our second Synoptic answer to the description of Papias; and, moreover, Papias does not speak of the work of Mark as a Gospel at all. It is strictly an exposition of the teaching of Peter, and nothing else. The title of Gospel, Evangelion, is an embellishment of later writers who buried the old tradition beneath a mass of their own fancies. It is in no way, therefore, necessary for us to account for the substitution of our present Gospel of Mark for an older one, for Papias does not say that an older Gospel of Mark ever existed; but even had he said so, there would have been no ground for wonder or perplexity. Books held to be of the highest importance in the earliest ages of the Christian Church have been rejected later on, and other books, not much heeded at first, have worked their way to the front. In the mass of forgeries multiplied during the first Christian centuries there was room for any amount of such substitution. But in this case there is not the faintest evidence that there was any substitution at all.

The remarks of Papias about Matthew are not less important, and have given rise to more prolonged controversy. But if we keep strictly to his words, the difficulty disappears. All that Papias says is that 'Matthew put together the sayings (of Jesus) in the Hebrew dialect, and each man interpreted them as he was

able.' Why some or any of these men did not set about translating the work is a question with which we need not trouble ourselves. The main point is, that Matthew, according to this account, wrote in Hebrew; and of this fact we must not lose sight for a moment. From the way in which Eusebius cites this sentence, it does not of necessity follow that Papias had his information about Matthew from the presbyter John, as he unquestionably had what he tells us about Mark. But there is no substantial ground for calling it into question, or for attempting to maintain that the word *Logia* (oracles, sayings, terse precepts, etc.) included historical narrative. It has been said that Philon applied the term to the narrative in the opening of the book of Genesis; but for Philon this was not narrative, but allegory, in which precisely the oracular sayings of the Holy Spirit were imbedded. It is impossible for any, except those who are determined to adhere to a foregone conclusion, to maintain that our first Synoptic, starting with the narrative of events preceding the birth of Jesus, and going on continuously with the record of his words and works to his final charge to the disciples on the Galilean mountain after his resurrection, can in any sense be described as an exposition of the Master's oracular sayings. Still more desperate is the assertion that the idea of a Hebrew original of Matthew's work (whatever that may have been) was a mistake. If so, it was a mistake made by Papias, and shared by all the patristic writers who had occasion to mention the subject. Where all are unanimous, there is no need to cite the expressions of any one in particular. Jerome, however, not only mentions that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, but confesses candidly that he does not know by whom the book was translated into Greek; nor does any other writer pretend to greater knowledge. But we may now treat as universally admitted the fact that our Gospel according to Matthew is an original Greek work, and not a translation at all, although this leaves us as completely in ignorance as we were before of the date and composition of our first Synoptic. Hence we have no right to say that our first Synoptic existed in the days of Papias, and

even less to affirm that it came directly or indirectly from the apostle whose name it bears. That Papias was acquainted with the Gospel according to the Hebrews is certain; but whatever may have been the number of Gospels known to him, he ascribed less authority to any of them than to that of which, as we have seen, he speaks as the living and abiding voice of oral tradition extending from the apostolic days to his own. At what time our *Matthew* was brought into its present shape we cannot tell; but it must have been at some date not earlier than the election of Marcus Aurelius to the Empire.

Precisely the same phenomena come before us when we turn to the writings which have been ascribed to Clement, bishop of Rome. It is, indeed, a work of supererogation to go minutely into the question which turns on the evidential value of the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions. They exhibit a multitude of references to the sayings and doings of the Master; but in no case is the source of the citations mentioned. In most instances, but not in all, passages bearing some likeness to them in our Gospels can no doubt be found; but there are always marked differences, and the likeness is often far-fetched. In almost all cases the comparison can be carried out only by dint of convenient theories of quotations from memory, of combinations of passages, or of citations made according to the drift rather than the exact words of the sentences adduced. That these writings are not the work of the Roman bishop to whom they are ascribed is universally admitted. It has been asserted that the Homilies are directed against the teaching of Markion; but on this supposition they cannot be earlier than A.D. 160, and thus their testimony can prove nothing for the genuineness of our Synoptic Gospels. In short, by the common judgement of critics, these compositions are assigned to some time between the middle of the second and the latter part of the third century.

Having seen in the case of Justin the results of the hypothesis of loose quotation from memory, and of deliberate combination of passages not connected with each other in our Gospels, we are

scarcely called upon to test this hypothesis again in reference to the so-called Clementines. The great fact is that in the vast number of citations of the sayings of Jesus scarcely two sentences are found which agree exactly with passages in our Gospels; and these are references to sayings which, if historical, would be the common possession of hundreds or of thousands. In the immense majority of instances the divergences are wide and striking; and for this very reason even small differences in quotations, which otherwise agree with sentences in our Gospels, become important. Thus in our Luke vi. 46 we have the words, 'But why call ye me Master, Master, and do not the things which I say?' and in the Homilies, viii. 7, we read, 'But why callest thou me Master, Master, and doest not the things which I say?' It might be thought that the differences here are altogether insignificant; but when we note that in the Gospel the words are addressed to a whole multitude in the plural number, and in the other, in the singular number, to one who frequently called him Master, yet did nothing which he commanded, we see, without going further, that the Clementine writer had another text before him. We may take, again, our Mark xii. 24: 'Do ye not therefore err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God?' and the Clementine Homilies, iii. 50: 'Therefore ye err, not knowing the true things of the writings, for which reason ye are ignorant of the power of God.' In our Gospel the words occur in the reply to the Sadducees on the subject of marriage as connected with the resurrection. In the Homilies they are found three times, and each time they introduce the assertion that there are true and false things in the Scriptures, and that error came from not distinguishing between them, the conclusion being, 'And Peter said, If therefore of the scriptures some are true and some are false, our Teacher rightly said, Be ye approved money-changers,'¹—a saying not found in our Gospels. Nothing more is needed to demonstrate that the Clementine writers had before them some Gospel which has not been included in our Canon; nor could we have clearer proof that

¹ See, further, *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 31.

they were not acquainted with our Synoptic Gospels, or that, if they were, they deliberately set them aside in favour of Gospels which would now be called apocryphal.

In spite of all efforts to the contrary, no greater help has been obtained from those writers of the second century who have left behind them a reputation for heretical opinions and teaching. On the authority of Agrippa Castor, Eusebius¹ states that Basileides, the propounder of a system of Gnosticism at Alexandria in the second quarter of the second century, 'composed twenty-four books upon the Gospels.' This, it has been asserted, must be a commentary on our four canonical Gospels; and with equal assurance it has been contended that he admitted the historical truth of all the incidents mentioned in our Gospels, and therefore that he recognised their exclusive and supreme authority. This statement rests on one sentence of a work attributed to Hippolytos, who, speaking of the followers of Basileides, says that after the generation of Jesus 'all things regarding the Healer (or Saviour), according to them, occurred in like manner as they have been written in the Gospels.'² The assertions are practically self-refuted. No mention is here made of any Gospels by name; and when we remember that there was a crowd of Gospels now regarded as spurious or apocryphal for no other reason than that they have not found their way into our Canon, nothing is gained towards establishing the genuineness and authority of our Gospels by asserting that certain writers in the second century admitted the truth of incidents mentioned in 'the Gospel' or 'the Gospels.' But the Commentary of Basileides has been lost, and no clear opinion can be formed of it from the fragments preserved in the quotations of later writers. It appears also that Basileides attached a peculiar sense to the word Gospel. It was the good news of a Being who had not been made known to men in the Jehovah or Yahveh of the Old Testament. It 'came first from the Sonship, through the Son, sitting by the Archon, to the Archon;' and therefore it 'is the knowledge of supermundane matters.' What-

¹ *H. E.* iv. 7.

² *Ref. omn. Hær.* vii. 27.

ever it may have been, then, it cannot have borne the least likeness to any of our Gospels. According to Clement of Alexandria, Basileides claimed to have obtained his knowledge from his own teacher Glaukias, of whom he speaks as the interpreter of Peter; and in this case he, like Papias, invested tradition with an authority greater than that of any written records, and consequently set aside our canonical Gospels as of no moment, if he knew of their existence. But in all this we have no clue to what Basileides himself may have said or taught. Hippolytos was writing some three generations later, and he takes little, or rather no, pains to distinguish between the opinions and teachings of the heresiarch and those of his followers. These disciples of Basileides in the time of Hippolytos may have been acquainted with our Gospels. This would have to be proved; but even Hippolytos nowhere asserts that they were known to Basileides himself. It is admitted that Hippolytos, writing with the utmost looseness, applies the phrase 'he says' indiscriminately to Basileides and to his later disciples. Having mentioned Basileides, and with him his son and follower, 'Isidoros, and their whole band,' he goes on to give details of their teaching, using the term 'he says' with an indiscriminate application to all of them. It is obvious that from such statements nothing definite can be ascertained as to the opinions or words of the heresiarch himself.

Nor is the case altered when we turn to Valentinus, another Gnostic teacher, who left Alexandria about A.D. 140, and was active in Rome for some twenty years from that time. Of him also it is asserted that he made use of our four Gospels. With our Gospel which bears the name of John he is said to have been acquainted, on the strength of the following passage from the *Philosophoumena* of Hippolytos, which for this purpose is quoted thus: 'Because the prophets and the law, according to the doctrine of Valentinus, were only filled with a subordinate and foolish spirit, Valentinus says, On account of this the Saviour says, All who came before me were thieves and robbers.' The sentence really runs as follows: 'All the prophets, therefore, and the law

spoke from the Demiourgos, a foolish god, he says, being foolish themselves, knowing nothing. On this account, he says, the Healer says, All who came before me were thieves and robbers.’¹ Valentinus is not named either in this passage or in its context; and in fact we have no evidence as to what Valentinus himself thought or said. When Irenæus speaks of the daughter of Iaeiros, dead and brought to life again, as a symbol of the Wisdom who is the Mother of the Master-worker, he uses the plural, ‘they say,’ not the singular, ‘he says.’ No doubt he is opposing Gnostics, and especially aiming his blows at the school of Valentinus; but fifty years may do a great deal to modify the attitude or the language of a school in itself. By the end of the second century our canonical Gospels were coming to the front, and were acquiring authority. It is perfectly intelligible that the followers of Valentinus in the days of Irenæus should make use of these Gospels, although it might have been impossible for Valentinus himself to use them. But for the most part, neither Irenæus nor Hippolytos cared to write with true critical accuracy. They apply the indefinite ‘he says’ without any name, so as to make it sometimes possible to assert that he was really speaking of the founder of the school. But this cannot be done always. When Irenæus in the preface to his first book explains his reasons for undertaking his work, he says that he has read the commentaries of the disciples of Valentinus (not, therefore, of Valentinus himself), and then goes on to say that he proposes to set forth the doctrines of those ‘who are *now* teaching falsehood,—I mean especially Ptolemaios and his supporters, an offshoot of the school of Valentinus.’ Here then we have demonstrative proof that Valentinus himself was not the antagonist whom Irenæus sought to overthrow; and any evidence for the existence of our Gospels coming from Ptolemaios and his disciples is a very different thing from the same evidence if it came from the master Valentinus. If the value of the latter would not be great, that of the former would be absolutely nothing; and clearly it is nothing less than

¹ Hippolytos, *Ref. omn. Hær.* vi. 35; *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 56.

absurd to argue that a faint likeness between some words of a Gnostic writer and a passage which may be found only in one of our Gospels constitutes a reference to the latter, unless it can be shown that the passage in our Gospel was not included in some one or more of the many other Gospels which have been excluded from our Canon, and have subsequently been lost. It is sheer absurdity to argue, on the strength of such distant references, that Valentinus agreed with the catholic writers of his day on the authority of the Canon, when neither in catholic nor in heretical writings is there the least evidence for the existence of a New Testament Canon at the time.

The life and writings of Markion have furnished a subject of still more keen and impassioned debate. A contemporary both of Basileides and Valentinus, he taught at Rome from about A.D. 140 to 160. With the character of his teaching we are not concerned; but it is a matter of importance to determine whether he furnishes any evidence for the existence of any of our canonical Gospels in his day. He is said to have recognised and used one Gospel only, with ten epistles written by, or ascribed to, Paul. The Gospel unfortunately is lost, and our knowledge of it comes only from the opponents who undertook to refute him; but of these opponents one, Tertullian, wrote about half a century after the time of Markion, and the other, Epiphanius, a century later still. We are thus at once brought to face the possibility or the likelihood that the Gospel which they condemned him for using was really not a Gospel used by Markion at all. According to them, he altered and mutilated our third Synoptic, for the expressed purpose of proving that the God of the Old Testament was not the same being with the God of the New. Both these writers adduce a large number of passages found in our third Gospel, which, according to their story, Markion cut out and cast away. A linguistic examination applied to these excised passages has been held to show that they come from the same hand which composed the rest of our third Gospel, and consequently that this Gospel was substantially in the hands of Markion. In this case the Gospel

of Luke in our Canon must have taken shape not later than the middle of the second century. It is a large inference to draw from such evidence as we have before us. His antagonists (living and writing, as we have seen, long after him) were as inaccurate as they were intolerant; and it is enough to say that, whatever Markion's Gospel may have been, his excisions were not made for the purpose which Tertullian ascribes to him. This object, Tertullian says, was the proving a disagreement between the religion of the Old Testament and that of the New. Whatever favoured this opinion in the third Synoptic he retained: whatever went against it he carefully cast aside. But according to Tertullian himself, Markion's labour in both these processes was entirely wasted and thrown away. What he has left, Tertullian declares, is as much opposed to his system as that which he rejected, and both alike suffice for his summary and complete refutation. In other words, it is Tertullian, not Markion, who refutes and convicts himself. Markion, whether right or wrong in his theology, was by universal admission a very able man: the course which Tertullian charges him with taking would show him to be a fool. The truth is that Tertullian is not to be trusted in such matters. He has no hesitation in charging the disciples of Markion with daily altering their Gospel, as they are daily refuted by catholics. But if so, how can we tell that the mutilated Synoptic was Markion's Gospel at all? The evil doings ascribed to him may on this hypothesis have been wrought altogether by his disciples. As Tertullian desired to prove that the Gospel so treated was our third Synoptic, he would naturally make his citations from Markion's so-called work in the words of that Gospel; and thus the agreement between the language of the passages said to have been cut out by him with that of our third Synoptic proves absolutely nothing. Markion's text is gone; and we cannot convict him on the unsupported assertions of his enemies. It is impossible to show that the excisions were made by Markion himself, or what was the wording of his text before it was mutilated. Until further evidence be forthcoming, it must

be held that from Markion we get nothing which shows that our four Gospels (or any of them) existed in their present shape in his day.

Another teacher, who, as having joined the society of the Encratites, became known as a heretic, is Tatian, an Assyrian who on his conversion to Christianity became a disciple of Justin Martyr. Of his works, his 'Address to the Greeks' is the only one which has been preserved. In this is found the following passage: 'he became master of all that we possess by means of a certain hidden treasure, in digging for which we were filled with dust, yet we give to it the occasion of abiding with us.' This, we are told, is a distinct reference to the parable of the hidden treasure given in our Matthew (xiii. 44). There is really no likeness at all between these passages; but were it ever so close, it comes simply to nothing, unless we are prepared to prove that the parable of the treasure hidden in the field was not found in any one of the now apocryphal Gospels which were at that time in use, and more or less widely held in honour. By such a method as this almost any conclusion could be established without difficulty; and a position must be desperate indeed which makes it necessary to resort to such courses. The Diatessaron of Tatian has been lost;¹ but the title has led some to suppose and to maintain that it was a harmony (whatever that may be or mean) of our four canonical Gospels. But the work is sometimes called Diapente as well as Diatessaron, and so this theory falls to the ground. The time of its composition must remain uncertain. During Justin's life Tatian was, or was supposed to be, perfectly orthodox; but in his Gospel he was charged with omitting certain passages because these did not harmonise with his own convictions, and this would imply that it belongs to a time later than the death of Justin. It is clear that Eusebius knew nothing of the work, and had never

¹ This statement is not affected by discoveries relating to Ephraem's commentary on the Diatessaron. It is unnecessary for me to enter into the question, which has been fully treated by the author of the *Inquiry into the Reality of Supernatural Religion* in his *Reply to Dr. Lightfoot's Essays*, 1889, pp. 145 *et seq.*

seen it, as he says that Tatian, 'having composed a certain connexion and bringing together of the Gospels, I know not how,¹ gave it the name of Diatessaron; and the book even now has some currency.' Eusebius is manifestly writing from hearsay. But in fact there is no evidence that Tatian himself ever called the book by this title, and some spoke of it as the Gospel of the Hebrews. It is of not the slightest use to cite the judgment of Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus. Theodoret's learning was neither deep nor solid, and he wrote three centuries after the lifetime of Tatian. It is enough to say that the word Diatessaron is first heard of in a work of the fourth century, and the superscription is thus seen to be totally destitute of authority. Even for the existence of our Gospels Tatian affords no evidence whatever.

Nor can any help towards this conclusion be obtained from Dionysios, bishop of Corinth, the author of some epistles, of which a few fragments only have been preserved. Of these letters one is addressed to Soter, bishop of Rome, who is said to have held the See A.D. 168-176. Of direct references to New Testament writings these fragments furnish none; but the letter to Soter had a passage, in which Dionysios complains of the mutilation of his own letters by heretics, and adds that 'it is not surprising if some have recklessly ventured to adulterate the scriptures of the Master when they have formed designs against writings which do not pretend to be of the same importance.' Here, it is argued, Dionysios is speaking of the writings of the New Testament generally. The argument is altogether extravagant. We have found thus far not a trace of the existence of any Canon of New Testament writings; nor does the expression of Dionysios point necessarily to any books which were afterwards included in it. The writers with whom we have had to deal know of no authoritative writings but those of the Old Testament; but in the eyes of Justin and others these

¹ In spite of Bishop Lightfoot's assertion to the contrary, there can be no doubt that Eusebius in this phrase expresses his own lack of acquaintance with the book. Why should Eusebius regard as an absurdity anything designed to add to and establish the authority of our four Gospels?

were, in truth, the Scriptures of the Master, inasmuch as all the Old Testament writings were held to apply to, and to speak of, the Anointed One, or the Christ. But if the term be taken to denote Gospels, we find it impossible to determine to what Gospels this reference is made. Papias, Hegesippos, Justin Martyr, and many more, made use of the Gospel according to the Hebrews; and long before our Gospels were heard of, writings like the Shepherd of Hermas and the epistle of Barnabas had acquired a wide, although it may not have been a permanent, authority. Whether the preface to our third Gospel be genuine or not, it is clear that the writer of it was aware of the existence of a multitude of Gospels, on the truth of which he throws not the least aspersion,—all that he claims being that his own is written with a full conviction of its truth. He does not even say that his own sources of knowledge were greater or better than theirs, or that they had done their work unconscientiously, or, in short, that their Gospels were in any way inferior to his own. They, like himself, had taken in hand to arrange a narrative of the life of the Master; and he likewise thought it his duty to do all that he could to keep alive a right memory of it. It is unlikely that this preface was written by the author of the Gospel; but these admissions are of supreme importance in estimating the literary morality of the time.¹

It may be thought that enough has been said to show that Christian writers to the sixth or seventh decade of the second century were either ignorant of the existence of our canonical Gospels, or deliberately preferred other Gospels to them. Not one of them, as far as we have gone, quotes from any one of them, and each of these cites, as coming from the Master, sayings which are not found in any of our Gospels. It is needless to come to writers of a still later age. Every decade enormously lessens the value of their evidence (if there should be any) for the genuineness and authenticity of our Gospels. But there still remain a few writers who may be regarded as contemporaries of Justin; and to these

¹ See pp. 57, 69.

we have confident appeals from the upholders of a traditional theology. One of these is Meliton, bishop of Sardeis, whose *Apology* was seemingly written after Commodus had been admitted to share the imperial power with his father Antoninus. This writer, it is argued, was acquainted not only with our Gospels, but with the Canon of the New Testament Scriptures. The assertion is made on the strength of a passage cited by Eusebius, in which Meliton says that his friend Onesimos had asked for citations from the Law and the Prophets, and also for an accurate account of the Old Books. This title, we are told, furnishes clear proof that Meliton had before him the books of the New Testament, in contradistinction with those of the Old. We are concerned here, not with conjectures, but with facts; and what Meliton says is this, that, having gone to the East, and reached the spot where the things were said and done, he there learnt accurately the books of the Old Testament, of which he sends his friend the list accordingly. Of anything beyond their titles he might, so far as his words go, be profoundly ignorant. Of books of a written New Testament no mention is made; and far from showing any acquaintance with them, it is clear that Meliton, though a bishop in the Christian Church, did not even know the titles of the books of the Old Testament, and could not, when asked, give a list of them. He is enabled to do this only when he has made a long journey for the purpose. The admission is startling indeed, and as important as it is startling.

The argument that because Meliton speaks of books of the Old Testament he therefore referred to a Canon of written books of the New Testament, is the result of nothing less than a blunder. Our canonical books of the New Testament received their title from the distinction already drawn between what should be called the Old Covenant and the New. Neither Paul nor any other writer of the first century denied the existence of a covenant between God and the children of Abraham; but in their belief that Covenant had grown old, and must give place to the New Covenant made with them in and by him who is the Anointed Healer, the only begotten

Son. This contrast is drawn with the utmost clearness and sharpness not only by the writer of our epistle to the Hebrews but by Paul himself. At the last supper Jesus is represented in our Synoptic Gospels as speaking of the blood of the New Covenant (Matt. xxvi. 28; Luke xxii. 20); and Paul pointedly contrasts the two in his genuine letters (Rom. ix. 4; Gal. iv. 24), describing the new covenant as that of the Spirit, not of the letter, and speaking of the veil which is on the Jews 'on the reading of the Old Covenant' (2 Cor. iii. 14). Here, then, we have a distinct mention of the written books of the Old Testament, which are read: but no one will contend that the words of the institution of the Eucharist imply the existence of a Canon of the New Testament Scriptures; nor will any one dare to say that any such Canon had been put together when Paul spoke of himself and his fellow-workers as sufficient ministers of the New Covenant (2 Cor. iii. 6).¹ It is needless to say that even on the supposition that Meliton was acquainted with a written Canon of New Testament Scriptures, we have not even the most distant hint as to the books which he would have included in it. The idea, however, is a delusion from beginning to end.

Efforts, not less futile, have been made to draw evidence for the early recognition of our canonical Gospels from some fragments ascribed to Claudius Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, whose

¹ Who the writer of our epistle to the Hebrews may have been is a matter of little consequence to us, or none. The general fallaciousness of his reasoning is a point of much more importance; and probably few pieces of more fallacious reasoning could be found in any book than the sentences in which this writer gives what he might wish others to regard as his views on the subject of a Covenant and a Testament. With an astounding audacity he assumes that the two words denote necessarily the same thing, and that as a testament may be a will drawn up by a mortal man for the guidance of his executors after his death, it is impossible for God to make a covenant with any without dying himself. The notion is an egregious absurdity. This hypothesis he supports by a fictitious or ceremonial death, the blood of calves and goats representing the death of the Almighty Father who had entered into a covenant with Abraham and his children. The divine covenant is, of necessity, in force from the moment in which it is made, and it is hard to think that in arguing to the contrary the writer was consciously honest. It is still harder to understand how he could suppose that his arguments would carry the least weight with the Jewish people generally.

Apology presented to Marcus Antoninus must, if it refers to the alleged miracle of the Thundering Legion, have been written about or soon after A.D. 174. Those fragments, which relate to the Paschal controversy, are preserved in the preface to the Paschal Chronicle; but this Chronicle is a work later by five centuries than the lifetime of Apollinaris; and the genuineness of these fragments has been seriously questioned even by strenuous traditional critics. Interested as Eusebius was in this controversy, it is extremely unlikely that he should have failed to mention Apollinaris had he written on this subject either on one side or the other. He quotes the works of Meliton, Irenæus, and Clement of Alexandria; and had any of these referred to Apollinaris, Eusebius must have noticed it. If, as the fragments imply, he took the side opposed by Victor of Rome, it is wellnigh incredible that no mention should be made of his having done so. Until we have evidence proving that these fragments are genuine, it is quite useless to adduce his authority for the existence of our canonical Gospels. But whatever his evidence might have been, it could carry no more weight than evidence coming from any one else at an interval of considerably more than a century and a half from the time with which he is supposed to deal.

Of Athenagoras, another apologist of about the same period, it is unnecessary to say anything. Like Justin and others, he is supposed to quote from the Sermon on the Mount and other discourses of our Gospels; and like those of Justin, his quotations in no instance agree exactly with our text, while most of them diverge widely, and some are not found in our Gospels at all. The attempt to adduce his authority for the existence of our Gospels in his day is open to the same fatal objection, that his citations may, and indeed must, have come from writings which have been excluded from our Canon. It is quite impossible that he could have obtained from our Synoptic or Johannine Gospels the saying of the Logos on the subject of the kiss of peace—that ‘if any one kiss a second time because it pleases him,’ he sins. ‘It is needful, therefore, to be careful about the salutation, as, if

it should be defiled ever so little by the intention, it places us outside of the life eternal.'

The persecutions under Marcus Aurelius, which called forth the vindications of Justin and other apologists, led the churches of Vienne and Lyons in Gaul to send to their brethren in Asia and Phrygia, and also to Eleutheros, bishop of Rome, an account of the martyrdom of the bishop Pothinus, the predecessor of Irenæus. This epistle, in part preserved by Eusebius, speaks of Vettius Epagathus, one of the sufferers, as one who 'was thought worthy of the testimony of the Elder Zacharias: he had walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, being unwearied in all good works for his neighbour, having much zeal for God, and fervent in spirit.' The phrase 'testimony of Zacharias' may be either the witness borne to the devout life of Zacharias, or the witness borne by Zacharias—in other words, his martyrdom. The sentence in which it occurs has been regarded as a clear reference to Luke i. 6. No one seemingly has supposed that any reference is intended to Luke xi. 51; but it is generally agreed that the person here named is the father of John the Baptist. As, however, our third Synoptic makes no mention of the martyrdom of Zacharias, it is far more likely that the citation is made from some Gospel which gave an account of that event, while there is the further probability, if not the certainty, that the opening chapter of Luke is not an original portion of the Gospel which bears his name. It is enough to say that even Tischendorf regards this passage as evidence for the use, not of our third Synoptic, but of the Protevangelion of James, which may be the same with the Gospel according to Peter.

The evidence already adduced amounts practically to demonstration that our Gospels were not known down to the seventh or eighth decade of the second century; and the multiplication of like instances is of little use indeed—or, rather, of none. Great efforts have been made to turn to account some fragments of the Gnostic teachers Ptolemaios and Herakleon. But at best their testimony is of less value far than that of Justin Martyr; and

there is really no valid ground for carrying them further back than the later lifetime of Irenæus himself, who speaks of them as strictly his own contemporaries; and the work of Irenæus on Heresies was not written until after he became bishop and had returned to Gaul, about A.D. 180.

The lifetime of the writer called Celsus, whose refutation was undertaken by Origen, is a subject of equally fruitless controversy. Origen wrote this refutation in the second quarter of the third century; but, strangely enough, he knew nothing of his opponent, and in the course of his work he passes through some curious changes of opinion about him. In his preface he writes under the belief that he was an Epicurean who wrote in the time of Hadrian (117-138), and speaks of him therefore as long since dead. Later on he becomes puzzled at his being intitled an Epicurean, when his opinions seem to be of a very different kind. The Celsus of the time of Hadrian wrote a work on Magic. Origen expresses his inability to decide whether the man whom he is refuting is that Celsus or not. Later still, he speaks of him as not only living and active, but as under promise to write a new book setting forth his system of philosophy, which is not Epicureanism but Neo-Platonism; and he asks his friend Ambrosius to get a copy of this new book and send it to him, that he may examine and refute it like the one with which he had already dealt. It would follow that Celsus, whoever he may have been, was living in the second quarter of the third century, and the 'Logos Alethes,' which Origen criticises, cannot have been written very long, if at all, before that time. His testimony in favour of our Gospels would therefore, had he given any, have been of extremely insignificant value; but his alleged references to passages in them are not exact, and therefore may have come from other sources. But he names no Christian books; and, so far as Celsus is concerned, the question as to the age of our Gospels remains just where it was.

The so-called Canon of Muratori has been a source of much disappointment to traditional critics. It exists in a single MS., which Muratori, who published it in 1740, ascribes to the eighth century.

It was found in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, and had belonged to the monastery of Bobbio. That the work should have come down in one copy only is itself a strange thing; but the book is curious in more ways than one. It is anonymous, and nothing can be gathered about the author. It deals with a subject of supreme interest for Eusebius. Yet Eusebius knows nothing of it. Had Papias and Hegesippos made any citations from it (and if they had known it, they must have done so), Eusebius could not have failed to mention, if not to reproduce, them. They must, therefore, have been as ignorant of it as he was himself. The inevitable inference is that it was not in existence in the time of any of them; in other words, that it is later than the third century—a date which deprives its testimony of all value.

The fragment of the work begins with the mention of the Gospel of St. Luke, of which it says that the author, not having had any personal knowledge of the Master, wrote as best he could, following his own judgement—in other words, that he was no original witness of the things of which he speaks. Having mentioned the Gospel of John, the fragment then names the Acts of the Apostles. This work, we are told (if we may trust a text which had grammar and bad writing have made almost unintelligible), relates the Acts of all the Apostles in one book—a description which does not in the least answer to our Acts, which takes little notice except of Peter and of Paul, and cuts short the story of Paul abruptly after his reaching Rome. It has been urged that the first two Synoptic Gospels must have been mentioned in the earlier part of the work, which has been lost. In great likelihood they were so; but the supposition must remain conjectural nevertheless. The writer of Luke is described as a companion of Paul; but as Paul was not personally associated with the Master, the evangelist could not gain from him much information with regard to the incidents of his life.

The question turns on the age of the fragment; and much stress is laid on a passage which may perhaps be translated as follows: 'Hermas very lately in our times wrote the Shepherd in

the city of Rome, his brother Pius sitting in the chair of the city of Rome.' The wording of this sentence makes it suspicious, as the phrase 'sitting in the chair of the Church' is not known until a much later time than the second century. It is further urged that sentences may have fallen out from the fragment, which is imperfect, and which may be a translation from a Greek original. Of such an original we have no knowledge whatever; but if the Latin text be a translation, how do we know that the translator did his work rightly? and again, if it be a translation, why may it not be interpolated? Why may not this very sentence be a forgery? The work ascribed to Hermas was little known in the Western Church; and there is not the least reason for supposing that Hermas is a person who ever lived. The fragment belongs to a time later probably than that of Eusebius; but even if we carry it back to the third quarter of the second century, it furnishes no evidence that the third Synoptic Gospel was the work of an eye-witness of the events narrated. On the contrary, it pointedly denies this, declaring that the writer got his knowledge at second-hand, and made the best use of it that he could.

CHAPTER III

THE AGE AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

WE have now seen that the Christian literature of the first two centuries of our era furnishes no evidence for the existence of our three Synoptic Gospels before the seventh or eighth decade of the second century,—that is, virtually, for a century and a half after the alleged occurrence of the events with which they profess to deal. It would be strange if we should find for our fourth or Johannine Gospel evidence which is not forthcoming for the others. It is needless to say that we do not find it; and it becomes wearisome to be compelled to go over ground already trodden, in order to show that distinct references and clear allusions are neither distinct nor clear, and that, in fact, there are no references at all. When the source of a quotation is not named, it is really idle to argue that it must come from some particular book, unless it can be shown that the same or similar matter might not be found in some other books. We are bound to bear carefully in mind all the lessons of caution which the previous examination should have impressed upon us. We cannot too often repeat that all the historical sayings of Jesus would be the common property of all who heard them; and if these sayings were habitually repeated, as the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels would lead us to suppose that they were, they might be recorded by tens or by hundreds of the hearers. The prefaces to the third Gospel and to the Acts may not come from the author, or authors, of those books; but they indubitably show, as we have seen, that

the writers were aware of the existence of a multitude of Gospels, and that the author of the preface to the third Gospel claimed no special authority for his own work over the rest, except in so far as his own information might be more abundant, and his own method of dealing with it more exact. Nor must it be forgotten, more particularly, that an allusion is not a reference, and that to argue seriously from supposed allusions to the existence and authority of important works is an utterly illegitimate process. Yet this is the process to which traditionalist partisans seem to be irresistibly tempted. The epistle of Barnabas speaks of the brazen serpent as a type of the Healer (Jesus); the Johannine Gospel has the prediction that the Son of Man must be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness: therefore the writer of the epistle of Barnabas was acquainted with our fourth Gospel, and recognised its authority. By such a method as this we can bring about any results which we may desire. The Shepherd of Hermas speaks of the Christ as 'a rock higher than the mountains, able to hold the whole world, ancient, and yet having a new gate:' therefore Hermas, or whoever wrote the Shepherd, was familiar with the language of the Johannine Gospel, although the latter speaks of the door of a fold, not the gate of a rock, and although the image of the rock was one which must have been known to the author of the Shepherd from his childhood.

The same treatment is applied with singular assurance to the so-called epistles of Ignatius. Every word is held to refer to the fourth Gospel, when Ignatius is represented as saying, 'I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born at a later time of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, which is his blood, which is love incorruptible and eternal life.' To suppose that the writer of this passage must have had before him John vi. 41-54 is merely extravagant and absurd. The expressions, or the equivalents of these expressions, occur in the Synoptic narratives of the institution of the Eucharist; and on the hypothesis that these sayings are historical, they would be the common property of all

who heard them. It is not easy to be patient, when, on the strength of such extremely distant likeness, we are told that the Ignatian writings are 'not without traces of the influence' of John. As we have said before, anything can be proved by such methods as these.¹ But the work of comparison is, in truth, superfluous. Of the passages cited from the letters of Ignatius only one is found in the three Syrian epistles; and we have seen that these epistles can no more be reckoned genuine than the rest.²

With equal assurance the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians is brought forward as proving the existence and authority of the fourth Gospel at the time when it was written, because this letter has some expressions which are construed into a reference to the first epistle bearing the name of John, and as the Epistle and Gospel are assumed to be from the same hand, any testimony for the one is testimony also for the other. A cause which has to be thus supported must be desperate indeed. It is enough to say that the epistle of Polycarp is a document which is both spurious and interpolated; and so far as we can say anything of Polycarp himself, we must hold that his personal evidence would be directly against the genuineness of the fourth Gospel. In the Paschal controversy Polycarp adopted the Synoptic view and sided strenuously with the Eastern Christians in maintaining that the festival of Easter should be celebrated on the 14th of Nisan, 'as the apostle John had enjoined.' The Roman bishop Aniketos failed to bring Polycarp to a different mind,³ and the latter is thus shown, conclusively, either to have been ignorant of the existence of this Gospel or to have denied its apostolic origin.

¹ The task of appreciating exactly these shadowy comparisons has been accomplished with infinite patience by the author of *Supernatural Religion*, vol. ii. p. 262 *et seq.* I have made no attempt to reproduce his exhaustive demonstrations, which, I must emphatically say, have not been answered. It may, indeed, be said that no real attempt has been made to answer them. All that I am concerned with here is to give the results of the inquiry, as they bear on the existence and authority of our Gospels in the sixth, seventh, or eighth decades of the second century of our era.

² See p. 76.

³ Eusebius, *H. E.* v. 24.

We have seen already¹ the extent to which the citation of the Master's sayings by Justin corresponds with the text of the Synoptics. It is enough to say here that the efforts to represent him as an authority for the genuineness of the Johannine Gospel are even more daring, and therefore also, in such a case as this, less successful; for the argument is not so much from a resemblance of words as from a harmony of idea. In short, the contention is that Justin obtained his theology of the incarnation from our fourth Gospel, and that he could not have obtained it from any other source. The evidence for these assertions lies in such passages as the following: 'Jesus Christ is alone peculiarly the Son begotten by God, being his Word and first-begotten and power'; '(he is) his Son, who alone is absolutely called his Son, the Word before all creatures, co-eternal with him, and begotten when at the first he made and ordered all things by him.' The positive proposition that Justin drew this doctrine from our fourth Gospel might, if the phraseology of the latter corresponded exactly with that of Justin, be proved without much difficulty, and admitted without reluctance. But their language does not correspond, and we are thus thrown back on the conclusion that Justin worked from other sources. The negative assertion that he could not have done this may be shown at once to be both untenable and extravagant. Justin unquestionably had before him the book known to us as the Apocalypse of John. It is the only book in our Canon which is named by him, and he emphatically ascribes to it a prophetic authority resting on direct revelation. In this book it is said of Jesus, the Lamb, that 'his name is called the Word of God': 'he is the beginning of the creation of God.' If he had before him any of our canonical Epistles he would find there the same language: 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. i. 24). It is unnecessary to multiply instances, or to do more than remark, that whatever is said by Justin had been said substantially by Philon; and from Philon we might go on to Plato.

¹ P. 80

But it is altogether more likely that Justin resorted to the same sources from which Philon drew the chief materials for his theology. The doctrine of the Divine Wisdom was, beyond doubt, shaped to a certain extent by Greek philosophy; but to Philon it came chiefly from the writings of his own countrymen. In all likelihood it was so with Justin also. There was no need for him to go to our Johannine Gospel, when he had before him the representation of the Wisdom of God given in the books of Proverbs (viii. 22 *et seq.*), and Ecclesiasticus (xxiv. 9 *et seq.*),—books which for him were undoubtedly authoritative Scripture; and the further fact remains, that his language and the general course of his thought correspond incomparably more with Philon than with our fourth Gospel. Nay, he himself cites the book of Proverbs as setting forth his own faith: ‘Another testimony, my friends, I said, I will give you from the Scriptures, that God before all the creation begat a Beginning, a certain rational power from himself, which by the Holy Spirit is called also the Glory of the Lord, and sometimes his Son, sometimes his Wisdom, sometimes Angel, sometimes God, and sometimes Lord and Word.’ So again: ‘The Word of Wisdom shall be my witness, being himself God begotten by the Father of all (worlds), being the Word, and Wisdom, and Glory of Him who begat him.’ Of this language some does not agree with, or is opposed to, that of our fourth Gospel, which knows, for instance, nothing of the Logos or Word as Angel or Apostle.

But as the language of Justin differs from that of our Johannine Gospel, so also does his evangelic history. He knows nothing of the special Johannine miracles or wonders, not even of the raising of Lazarus, while his account of the incidents in the life of the Master is in every case more or less opposed to, and sometimes excluded by, that of our fourth Gospel. The latter takes no notice of the nativity at Bethlehem, or the descent from David, or the baptism in Jordan. Justin is precise in his descriptions of these events, tracing the genealogy through Mary, speaking of him as born in a cave, and as the son of Mary and Joseph,

mentioning the agony and prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, which are altogether opposed to the idea of our fourth Gospel, and holding that Jesus celebrated the passover with his disciples before his passion. Justin further limits the ministry to a single year, agreeing in this with our Synoptics, but differing pointedly from our Johannine narrative. When we remember further his emphatic assertion that the sentences uttered by the Master were 'brief and concise, for he was not a sophist, but his word was a power of God,' it is absurd, or rather impossible, to suppose that Justin had before him the long, elaborate, and perplexing discourses of the fourth Gospel. From Justin, therefore, we can get no evidence for the existence of that Gospel in the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, while all that he says tends to prove that he had neither seen nor heard of it.

Of Hegesippus it is unnecessary to say anything. Of Papias we need only note that Eusebius, who was most of all anxious to adduce all the testimony that could be got together in favour of our canonical books, makes no reference to Papias as throwing any light on the composition of the fourth Gospel. It is not true to say, and it is therefore useless to argue, that Eusebius did not care to adduce evidence for the use of undisputed books. Had he said so, his position would have belied his words. But he says nothing of the kind. His words are to this effect: 'In the course of my history I shall be especially careful, together with the successions (in the Sees), to show what use the several ecclesiastical writers have made of any of the disputed books, and also of the collected and acknowledged writings, and also what they have said of those which are not such.'¹ In short, it was his purpose to tell us all that he could learn of all the books accepted and respected, doubted, or rejected by Christian writers and Christian societies, and not to confine himself to any one class to the exclusion of the rest. The silence of Eusebius is, therefore, conclusive proof that he found nothing in Papias bearing on the composition of the fourth Gospel. If, further, Papias recognised the authority of the

¹ *H. E.* iii. 3, 24.

Apocalypse, and ascribed its composition to the apostle John, then, if it be shown that the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John could not have come from the same author, Papias becomes a powerful witness, not in favour of, but against, the latter.

We have seen that the Clementine Homilies, whenever they may have been written, belong to a time which would take away all force from their evidence in favour of the fourth Gospel,¹ if they furnished any. But they do not. It is vain to argue that, when the Clementine writer represents Jesus as saying, 'I am the gate of life: he who comes in through me comes into life, as there is no other teaching which is able to save,' he must have had before him the passage, John x. 9, in which Jesus says, 'I am the door. If any one enter through me, he shall be made whole, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.' The value of such pleading must depend on previous proof that the words in the Johannine Gospel could not have been found in any other. It is impossible to show this, while at the same time there is no reason to doubt that they were contained in the Gospel of the Hebrews, or some one or more of the many Gospels then in circulation. The differences in the quotations are, moreover, sufficiently marked; and we have seen² what might be the result in the case of much more minute differences, if any one of our Synoptic Gospels had been lost. We are bound also, it must be repeated, to remember that all our Synoptic Gospels depended for their materials on each other, and also on narratives afterwards rejected or lost, while the Johannine Gospel in like manner is indebted both to the Synoptics and to other books which have either in part or wholly perished. In the present instance the certain conclusion is that the Clementine writer knew nothing of our Johannine Gospel. The Homilies make it a reproach to the apostle Paul (under the guise of Simon the magician) that he had assumed his apostolic office without adequate authority. 'Why,' it is asked, 'did the Teacher remain and discourse a whole year to us who were awake, if you became his apostle after an hour's instruction?' Our fourth Gospel

¹ See p. 89.

² P. 71.

extends the ministry over two or three years. Had the Clementine writer known of this version, he must have cited statements so enormously strengthening his argument. But he does not cite them; and we are driven to infer that at that time our Johannine Gospel was not in existence.

The epistle to Diognetos, which was for some time ascribed to Justin Martyr, is anonymous, and cannot be said to have been written before the latter part of the second century.¹ Nothing is known of the writer or of the person to whom it is addressed. To any who examine it it will be clear that the writer was indebted for his materials chiefly to the epistles of Paul as well as to some other letters included in our Canon. A strong effort has been made to establish a direct Johannine connexion for the following passage: 'This one he sent to them—are we to say, as some might argue, for purposes of tyranny, terror, and bewilderment? Assuredly not; but in kindness, in gentleness. As a king sending his son, a king, he sent (him); he sent him as God; he sent him as to men; as healing (men), he sent (him); as persuading, not forcing,—for violence there is not with God. As inviting, not as pursuing (them), he sent (him). He sent (him) as loving, not as judging. For he will send him to judge, and who shall abide his presence?' It will be seen that there are passages in our fourth Gospel which to a greater or less extent exhibit a likeness with these sentences; but there is a far closer parallel between them and passages in the Pauline letters.²

Of the so-called heretical writers of the second century it is scarcely needful to take any account. References to our fourth

¹ See further, *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 38.

² Rom. v. 8, 9: 'God proveth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then shall we be healed through him from wrath.' Rom. viii. 1-3: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, God sending his own Son.' The writer, however, draws most largely from Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, where we have precisely the language which he uses, 2 Cor. v. 19, 20, 10, 11. We may compare also Gal. iv. 4, Eph. ii. 4, 1 Thess. v. 9, 1 Tim. i. 15, 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. Whether these are all genuine letters of Paul is a question which is here altogether irrelevant.

Gospel are said to be found in passages quoted by Hippolytos from some works of Basileides: but Hippolytos writes loosely, confusing the statements of the disciples of his school with the sayings of the alleged heresiarch himself, and so stripping his own words of all value historically. The same is the case with Valentinus and with Markion. It is impossible to prove that either of them was in any way indebted to our Johannine Gospel; and as its language would often have been of the greatest use for their special purposes, it is incredible that they should not have availed themselves of it, if only it had been known to them.

Of Tatian¹ we need only note that his doctrine of the Logos is wholly different from that of the fourth Gospel; but even if it be allowed that the latter is the source of some of his ideas (and no such concession can be made), nothing would be established beyond the mere fact that the fourth Gospel was in existence in the latter part of the second century, that is, a hundred and fifty years after the time of which it professes to give a history. With the same remark we may dismiss Dionysios of Corinth, Meliton of Sardeis, and Claudius Apollinaris. It seems a mere extravagance to insist on deriving from John xvi. 2 ('an hour is coming, that every one who kills you may seem to offer service to God') the sentence in the epistle of the churches of Vienne and Lyons which says, 'A time will come in which every one who kills you shall seem to offer service to God.' If the saying be historical, it is just one of those which would find their way into a multitude of evangelic narratives. In like fashion the epistle to Flora, ascribed to Ptolemaios, is said to contain a reference to the opening verses of the Johannine Gospel. But the quotation in this passage occurs in a parenthesis which breaks in upon its sense and coherence, and was in all likelihood inserted in it by Epiphanius himself, when he cited it.

When Celsus charges Christians with altering a Gospel from its first written form in threefold, fourfold, and manifold ways, he is supposed by some to refer to our four canonical Gospels.

¹ See p. 95.

If it be so, why, after mentioning threefold and fourfold corruptions, should he go on to speak of corruptions which are manifold? But this Celsus was clearly a contemporary of Origen; and what value towards proving the genuineness and authority of the Johannine Gospel would there be in charges of mutilation and corruption brought by a heathen writer of the third or fourth century? The so-called Canon of Muratori gives a fabulous and worthless account of the manner in which the fourth Gospel was composed. It is scarcely to the credit of modern theology to adduce as testimony in favour of a canonical book an absurd fiction, which, if it has any meaning at all, implies that the apostolic origin of the Gospel had been emphatically denied.

There are, however, some peculiar circumstances connected with the authorship of our fourth Gospel which must be taken into account before we can form a deliberate judgement on the whole case. No mention of it is made in the early Christian literature down to the second half of the second century; and still less have we any evidence which lends any countenance to the notion of its coming from the apostle John. The popular belief maintains that this apostle is the author of five of our canonical writings, *i.e.* of the fourth Gospel, of the three Epistles which bear the name of John, and of the Apocalypse. This alleged fact makes it easier to reach a definite conclusion on this point. The Apocalypse and the fourth Gospel differ from each other so absolutely that it is next to impossible to imagine that both can come from the same author; and it is remarkable that in an uncritical age these differences were the first to attract anything approaching to critical notice. They led Dionysius of Alexandria, in the third century, to the decisive conclusion that the two books could not possibly be works of one and the same author. His reasons, so far as they go, are critical; and he uses a short and trenchant method for solving the great dilemma on which so much time and trouble has been spent during the present and the last century. Dionysius decided in favour of the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel; but the lack of critical knowledge and power deprives his opinion of

any great value. The only point for which it is worth anything is the one assertion, candidly and unhesitatingly made, that both books could not have been written by one man.

But for the authorship of the Apocalypse (or of part of it) we have clearer evidence than for any other writings in the New Testament Canon, except the genuine letters of Paul. Papias apparently recognised the book as of the highest authority, regarding it as the outcome of direct revelation; and Justin Martyr, who never names any other book of our New Testament writings, most assuredly so esteemed it. According to Eusebius, Meliton of Sardeis wrote a treatise on the book, and Eusebius, to whom millenarian views were pre-eminently unwelcome, would, if Meliton had thrown any doubt upon the work, have most certainly mentioned the fact. As to the date of its compilation there is seemingly no doubt.¹ It was thrown into its present form in the year 68-69. The writer repeatedly names himself John, and distinctly claims to speak as a prophet. The writer of the fourth Gospel nowhere names himself; and it can scarcely be supposed that any one of the Master's original followers could set to work seriously to put together a record of his life without giving it the full sanction and attestation of his name. The case of our Synoptic

¹ It would be, perhaps, to expect too much if we were to suppose that Dionysius had fixed his mind on the actual composition of the Apocalypse. He could but take the book, as a whole, in the form which it had assumed in his day; and of this book he said that it could not possibly have been written by the author of the fourth Gospel. But in fact he was dealing with a book made up of the writings of two, three, or more authors. Into this question I cannot enter; nor is it necessary for me to travel over ground which Dr. Davidson has surveyed with thorough exactness. It is enough to give his conclusions, which are briefly these: that the book was not written continuously, and is the product of different minds; that the parts are loosely joined and inartificially welded together; that the first two chapters, having no connexion with the body of the work, were inserted at the beginning of the Apocalypse proper by a later writer; that the greater part of the book is strictly Jewish in its character, the main body being a Jewish apocalypse, with Christian interpolations; and that different parts of the book consequently justify different dates. It follows that the anathema on those who interfere with the text is only a method employed to obtain credit for the apocalyptic visions generally, and is probably one of the latest additions to the work. We may note, further, that there is a close agreement in thought and feeling between the two, or more, writers of the Apocalypse.

Gospels is not to the point. These Gospels exhibit no unity of authorship. They have been shaped by many editors. The Gospel of Luke, if we pay any heed to the preface, professes to be only one of many similar narratives. That of Mark is clearly an epitome of one or more of these Gospels, and that of Matthew is clearly not the Gospel known by that name to Papias¹ and other writers. At the time when the Apocalypse took its present shape, what other John could there be who could write with such tones of authority as those which characterise this book? How could we for any book expect to get so close an agreement between its language and spirit and the general picture drawn of the apostle John in our Synoptic Gospels? He is there emphatically the son of thunder, forbidding men to work wonders in the Master's name, unless they actually followed him; eager to call down fire from heaven on Samaritan villagers who refuse to hear him; and, above all, able to drink of the Master's cup and to be baptized with his baptism, in the hope that he and his brother might sit the one on his right hand and the other on his left in his kingdom. After the Master's death John clearly remained in Jerusalem, as we learn from the genuine epistles of Paul, who speaks of visiting him during his second visit to the holy city after his conversion. Not less decidedly than Peter and James, he was an apostle of the circumcision—a Jew speaking to Jews, and confirming them in every conviction as to the perpetuity of their law and of the rites which were the warrant and the pledge of it. He is one of the three pillar apostles who give the right hand of fellowship to Paul, on the one condition that they are not called on to take part in his work, which they have no heart to share. At the time when he wrote the latest chapters of the Apocalypse (if the work be his at all), he would be a man of nearly sixty years of age, even if we suppose that he was ten years younger than the Teacher whom he followed. At this age his mental habits and his modes of expression would all be fixed: and it would be utterly absurd to imagine that twenty or thirty years later he

¹ See p. 87.

would be speaking a wholly different language and thinking quite different thoughts. Yet this, and nothing less than this, he must have done, if any part of the Apocalypse and the fourth Gospel come from the same hand. In place of the harsh Hebraisms and broken grammar of the former, we have in the latter the most highly cultivated form of Hellenistic Greek. The fierce vehemence of the Apocalyptic prophet is altogether absent from the Gospel; and in its stead we have a placid gentleness, modified only, as in the prayer of Jesus (John xvii. 9), by an ecclesiastical exclusiveness which points to a later age in the history of the Christian Church. In place of the denunciations of Paul which are conspicuous in the Apocalypse, we have a theology which is largely indebted to the Pauline epistles, and perhaps could hardly have been developed without them. The writer of the Apocalypse is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, for whom the exaltation of the chosen people comes before every other consideration; the writer of the Gospel is one for whom the Jews are the enemies of the Christ, with whom he has no sympathy, and of whose ways and modes of worship he has no personal knowledge. He speaks of the Jews' manner of purifying, of their ways of burying, of their feasts, and of their law, as things with which he had no concern. For him the Jew, as such, is obstinate in his rejection of the Master's teaching, and in his disbelief of the grounds on which the Divine Son claims their allegiance. From the Jews who hear him as he speaks within the temple courts comes all the rudeness which interrupts his discourses, and from them also come the stupid materialistic remarks which suggest the subjects on which these discourses enlarge. Not only are they constantly on the watch to kill him (v. 18, vii. 13, 19, viii. 40, xix. 12), but to carry out their design they are ready to dispense with all judicial processes and to inflict death without a judge, without a charge, without examination and without a sentence (viii. 59). The evangelist (whoever he may have been) wrote perhaps without greatly heeding the words which his pen wrote down; but his words imply that within the

temple courts heaps of stones were provided which 'the Jews' might at any moment use for the slaying of any one by whose speaking they might be offended.¹ Nothing can show more clearly than this the absurd ignorance of the writer of all things Jewish. But, in truth, it would seem that with his ignorance of the Jewish people there was combined a studied design to put the words of Jesus into just those forms which would be most sure to offend and irritate them. They are represented as angered with the saying that Moses had not given them the true bread; and on their saying so they are told that the Divine Son who addresses them will give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink, and that unless they eat the one and drink the other they can have no life in them. There can be no doubt that these ideas, if thus abruptly and nakedly put before them, would in the Jewish mind generally cause a deep repulsion, and the words selected seem to be specially qualified to create it. This is of more importance than mistakes made as to the tenure of the high priest's office, or in the geography of Palestine, though these may be serious enough. It is unnecessary here to say more as to the simultaneous high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, or on the extreme unlikelihood that a rough Galilæan peasant should be the kinsman of one of them, or at all events should be possessed of such influence as to be able to go in and out of his house at will, and to introduce others into it (xviii. 16). Nor need we say more here of the substitution of Bethabara for Bethany, a place which never existed beyond Jordan, nor of the impossibility of identifying Ænon, where the Baptist is said to have carried on his special work, nor of the fact that the pool of Bethesda, wholly unknown now, was unknown also to Josephus, although in his day it had the marvellous properties ascribed to it in the fourth Gospel, and also that nothing more is known of the city near to which Jesus had his conversation with the woman of Samaria.

The way in which the evangelist is spoken of in the fourth

¹ The suggestion that the stones were at hand because the temple was undergoing repairs calls for no notice.

Gospel, as compared with the description given of him in the other three, bears more directly on the question of its authorship. The writer speaks throughout as one who stood in a peculiar relation to the Master; as being the only one for whom Jesus felt the affection of what we may call a personal love; as lying on his breast at supper; as being the medium of communication between the Master and others; as being intrusted from the cross with the special care of his mother. How completely the story of the Synoptic Gospels differs from this picture we have already seen. Not a word as to any personal affection of Jesus for John can be gleaned from them or from any of the Apocryphal Gospels (so far as they are known to us), nor is the fact noticed by any other of the early Christian writers. None of them gives him that precedence over the rest which is attributed to him in the fourth Gospel; and Papias, speaking of those whose words he had sought to learn from oral tradition, mentions five of the apostles before he names John.¹ It is, of course, impossible even for the most strenuous apologists to shut their eyes to these and other differences between the Johannine and Synoptic pictures of John the son of Zebedee. Their efforts are directed chiefly towards magnifying the changes introduced into the Gospel by amanuenses or secretaries during the process of composition. According to some of these writers the evangelist was eighty or ninety years of age, and as he dictated, his scribe altered or modified his language, and did so with the greater readiness because the book was to be reserved for private circulation. But the errors subsequently spread abroad as to the duration of the apostle's life led the evangelist to add a supplementary chapter for the purpose of correcting them; and, with this supplement, also freely altered by his friends, the Gospel was by the apostle's permission published at once.

We have only to see what this account implies. Of the notion of literary honesty exhibited in it we need say nothing; nor need we dwell on the astounding inconsistency between the conduct of the evangelist and the commands of the Master whom

¹ See p. 83.

he professes himself so eager to obey. Of that Master he was one of the twelve special missionaries, charged with the task of going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature. Yet he postpones for half a century the composition of the book which was to record what he remembered of his teaching; and when at length it is written, he withholds his name from it, and declares that he has drawn it up for private circulation only. Then, finally, with the sole design of correcting some mistakes which concerned him personally, he gives his consent to what we may call its formal publication. These suppositions are all incredible; but, if we give any heed to them, we must conclude that the scribes altered his language from beginning to end, substituting the most polished Hellenistic Greek for his rugged and uncouth Hebraisms and his false grammar, keeping back his name, but assigning to him a precedence not accorded to him in the Synoptics, and, it would seem, converting the most Jewish of the apostles into one for whom the Jews were the enemies of the Messiah. It is needless to say that this would not be all, for we may ask whence came the philosophy which makes the Gospel throughout to be what it is? The whole hypothesis is, however, sheer assumption, which could never have been made but for the need of upholding a foregone conclusion. Except on the hypothesis that the apostle John dictated, and that his scribe made his insertions as he went along, the conclusion that the writer was not an eye-witness of the events recorded would be established by the following words: 'He that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe' (xix. 35). But inasmuch as the Gospel was written by the apostle John, therefore this is an insertion of the scribe, although the surer guarantee would have been a superscription similar to that which we find in the Apocalypse (xxii. 8), 'I John am he who heard and saw these things.' The modern theory implies that John the writer of the Gospel would do anything rather than reveal his name in attestation of his work.

It is not less astonishing (on the supposition of a single author-

ship for the two works) that the later one should give not the least indication of the contents of the former. The Apocalypse, completed perhaps a quarter of a century before the date popularly assigned to the Johannine Gospel, gives a series of prophetic pictures which are to be converted into facts of history within a very short time. How is it that of the book exhibiting these pictures the writer of the Johannine Gospel is profoundly unconscious? According to the Apocalypse, the unfolding of the great drama would be going on at the very time when the author of it was writing or dictating the fourth Gospel. Had then all these wonderful visions been fulfilled, and had their fulfilment made no difference in the phenomena of the physical or the spiritual world? Or did the writer regard his former work as of so small moment that even the most distant allusion to it seemed to be no longer called for? In this case we should have to conclude that the visions of the Apocalypse remained visions still—that the work was the result of illusion—and that the author of the fourth Gospel must have looked back upon it with a regret bordering upon pain. If the evangelist so regarded it, he was bound to say so; but there is no token of any such feeling, and no sign that he even knew of the existence of the book. On the supposition that the two books came from the same author such a state of things is morally incredible. We may say more. If it had been a fact that twenty or thirty years after writing the Apocalypse the author of it had written the fourth Gospel, this fact would most certainly have become known with wildfire speed throughout all branches of the Christian Church; and the result of this fact would have been so complete a discrediting of the book called the Apocalypse as would have made its insertion in any Canon of New Testament Scriptures altogether impossible. The Chiliastic or millenarian expectations of the time were fed by, if they did not actually rest on, the visions and declarations of the Apocalypse. These expectations could not long have survived the tidings of the deliberate backsliding of its author; and a new complexion would have been given to much of the literature of the first Christian centuries.

But even if, apart from all this, we grant that the fourth Gospel is the work of the apostle John, what will be the value of his narrative, and of any attestation which he may make in support of it? According to this supposition, he would be writing at least half a century after the occurrence of the incidents and the delivery of the discourses with which he professes to deal. Let us allow him the strongest memory and the clearest apprehension with which mortal man has ever been endowed; and what ground shall we have even then for the trustworthiness of his narrative and the accuracy of his report? No one will affirm that any head will carry the details of orations or conversations for more than four or five years; and in the case of the apostle John the difficulty of retention would be greatly increased. During the whole time, his mind, we must suppose, had been steeped in the Master's words; and as his thoughts on the subjects of these discourses were developed and expanded, his recollections would by the same process be modified. With the most conscientious efforts to be exact and truthful, the result might, and indeed would, certainly be something extremely different from the words which he had heard. His work may be, as it has been called, 'glorified gospel history' made up from 'glorified recollections;' but an accurate report of the things said and done it could not possibly be.

We cannot do more here than merely mention the vast difference between the account of the Master's teaching in the *Johannine* Gospel as compared with that of the Synoptics. This *fact* is now generally, perhaps universally, admitted. It *is* granted that we cannot pass from the latter to the *former* 'without feeling that the transition involves the *passage* from one world of thought to another. No *familiarity* with the general teaching of the Gospels, no *wide* conception of the character of the Saviour, is sufficient to destroy the contrast which exists in form and spirit between the earlier and later narratives.' We shall see the extent of the difference when we come to the examination of the narratives. It may be enough to say here that the glorified recollections of the apostle have reduced the language of the speakers in his work to an

unvarying uniformity of expression and style. The words of the narrator himself, and those of the Master and of John the Baptist, are all cast in the same mould, and so completely run in the same lines, that it is sometimes impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins; and this form or mould is in every respect different from that which his teaching exhibits in our Synoptic Gospels. The significance of this lies in the fact that the Johanne teaching lays down certain conditions of belief which are to be paramount; and these conditions are not to be found in the Synoptics. The latter profess to publish the glad tidings of the Divine love for men, and to furnish for all mankind all things necessary for their spiritual health. Yet, if the Master's teaching followed the lines of the fourth Gospel, the Synoptics entirely fail to fulfil their promise or to answer their purpose. To the question, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' put to him in the Synoptics, Jesus replies by quoting the Old Testament precepts enjoining the love of God. To the question in the Johannine Gospel, 'What must we do that we may work the works of God?' the answer is, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he sent'—a condition for which we look in vain in the other Gospels. The difference between them is not merely one of colouring; it is an essential difference of ideas. The efforts made to uphold the authority of all the four Gospels in spite of this radical divergence are as desperate as they have been strenuous. We are told, for instance, that allowance must be made for the effect of time upon memory; that, in the case of this apostle, writing half a century after the events which he professes to narrate, verbal accuracy in the reports of speeches was not to be looked for; that, wishing to reproduce for others the peculiar charm which the discourses of Jesus had exercised on his own mind, he availed himself of a freedom in the revivification of those old recollections which was fully warranted by the practice of the greatest writers of antiquity, and that thus into the language of his discourses he introduced that conception of the manifestation of the Christ which had long been deeply rooted in his spirit. We

are thus brought back, as we have seen already, to the glorified recollections of past history; but we are as far as ever from being able to determine what may come from the apostle's imagination, and what may really be a true representation of the facts.

It is only necessary to notice further here that the Johannine Gospel has a thaumaturgy which, with only one or two exceptions, is peculiarly its own. The incidents so recorded are of the most astounding kind; and the most astonishing of all—the raising or revivification of the body of Lazarus—is described as the proximate and immediate cause of the arrest of Jesus and of his death. But of this event, and of all the circumstances preceding and following it, the Synoptic Gospels know absolutely nothing, and, in fact, they exclude them.

We are told, lastly, that as the Johannine Epistles clearly come from the same hand which has left us the Johannine Gospel, the use of the first of these epistles by Polycarp and Papias is evidence for the genuineness and authority of the Gospel. If Polycarp did so make use of this epistle (and this is extremely doubtful), he did not mention the name of the writer; nor can we gather from the passage of Eusebius that Papias regarded it as the work of the apostle John. The first ascription of this letter to John the apostle comes from Irenæus and Clement of Alexandria; and testimony of this date is of no use towards establishing the genuineness of either the Epistle or the Gospel. Whatever evidence we can get as to the alleged author from the Synoptics or from other early Christian literature goes against the notion that the Johannine Gospel comes from John the son of Zebedee; and the history of the Paschal controversy is decisive against it. This question of the day for celebrating Easter was keenly debated between the East and the West, and the Roman bishop Aniketos used all his efforts in vain to persuade Polycarp to celebrate the feast two days after the eating of the Paschal lamb. Polycarp adduced the practice of John, as upholding the Synoptic account that Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples, and was crucified on the day after the Passover, that is, on the 15th Nisan, and rose on the

17th; and it may be confidently concluded that it was the long residence of the apostle at Ephesus, or elsewhere in Asia Minor, which led to this practice. But in the fourth Gospel Jesus has simply an evening meal with his disciples on the day before the slaying of the Paschal lamb, and is himself, as being the true Paschal Lamb, slain on the day of the Passover. The testimony of Papias on this point has not been questioned; but if it cannot be overthrown, then the apostle John was not the author of the fourth Gospel. No process of glorified recollection could have given shape to a narrative which belies the practice of his latest, not less than of his earlier, years.

Thus for the first century and a half of our era we fail to get any evidence even of the existence of our canonical Gospels, and far less for their recognition as authoritative. When we come to Irenæus the scene is changed. The four Gospels of the Nicene Canon have thrust aside the others which had contested possession of the field, or of portions of it; and there are high theological reasons why their victory was inevitable. There are four quarters of the world, and four winds. The cherubim are four-faced, and the four Evangelists have each some one of the special characteristics of these mysterious beings. The wild nonsense of these notions throws light on the mental conditions under which the multitude of the Gospels took shape, and which led to the ultimate acceptance of four, and to the rejection of the rest as at all events destitute of apostolic authority. But the four which have won the day stand on precisely the same foundation. They all contain more or less of matter in common with that of the narratives which they displaced; and we know neither the names of the writers nor the times when they were written, except that they had not taken their present shape before the sixth or seventh decade of the second century. For not one of these Gospels, then, have we the direct contemporary testimony of any one of the personal followers of the Great Teacher; nor is it contended,—indeed it could not be contended,—that the four narratives tell us anything about any of his personal followers for more than a

few days after the crucifixion. The only book which professes to tell us anything more about them is the Acts; and this makes no mention of the twelve after the election of Matthias, and takes no account of any except Peter, James, and John, nothing also being said about even these after the alleged deliverance of Peter by the angel from his prison-house. There are, therefore, only some five or six of the personal followers of the Master of whom we learn more than their names; and such information as we have even of these consists of only casual notices of a few scattered incidents in their lives. We hear of the slaying of James the brother of John with the sword, and of occasional persecutions; but it can scarcely be said that they are among the fiercest which the preachers of all new faiths have had to undergo. For whatever they may have said, done, or suffered, we have no contemporary testimony whatever, except that which we may get from the Apocalypse, and from Paul's letters to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Romans; and these tell nothing of the extraordinary signs, wonders, and prodigies recorded in the Gospels and the Acts. In short, we know next to nothing of any of them, if we put aside the five or six prominent actors in the earliest years of the Christian Church.

Thus, without going further, the foundation laid by Paley, and the superstructure which he raised upon it with so much care, are both swept, not partially but utterly, away.¹ He is not contending

¹ With astounding audacity the writer of the Preface to the tenth edition of *Lux Mundi* tells us, p. xxxvii, that the fabric is stronger than ever. 'Our New Testament documents,' he declares, 'have passed through a critical sifting and analysis of the most trenchant and thorough sort in the fifty years that lie behind us. From such sifting we are learning much about the process through which they took their present shape. But in all that is material we feel that this critical investigation has only reassured us in asserting the historical truth of the records on which our Christian faith rests.'

The *feelings* of the writer furnish a basis of argument or evidence; and assertion is an easy thing when no attempt is made to exhibit the grounds on which it rests. We, on the other hand, might express our feelings on the astonishing literary impertinence (in the strict sense of the term) which seems to have prompted the words of the writer of this Preface; but we are content to abide by what has been already said on the relations of Paul with the chiefs of the church in Jerusalem.

that we may without extravagance profess to know something of what they taught; he wants their testimony primarily and especially to establish the truth of the extraordinary incidents recorded in the Gospel histories. If the truth of these alleged facts cannot be maintained, then we have, he insists, no warrant that God the Father has made himself manifest to men in and through the Eternal Son by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As to this there can be no mistake. Miracles, *i.e.* things which make us wonder, are, according to his position, the one indispensable guarantee for the truth of Christian faith; but he has this guarantee in the lives of the apostles, and he rests upon it with confident serenity.

‘If twelve men, whose probity and goodness I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they could be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat was communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them one after another, consenting to be racked, burned, or strangled,—still, if Mr. Hume’s rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity.’

A more veritable house of cards could never have been built. From first to last Paley’s words exhibit a complete lack of appreciation of the laws of evidence. What he says comes practically to this, that, given the probity, or supposed probity, of the witness, then whatever he may say must be accepted as fact. Even if this be granted (and it is, of course, only a wild delusion) his argument is not to the point here, for the ground which we have already traversed shows us that we know nothing about the

supposed witnesses. Paley's twelve men are, of course, the twelve apostles; and the miracle wrought before their eyes must be the sensible resurrection of the Master. If it be not so, his comparison becomes altogether irrelevant. But of the history of these twelve it is a ludicrous misrepresentation. According to all the Gospel narratives, the visible resurrection was an event not witnessed by any one. It was not, therefore, wrought before their eyes; and it is absurd to talk of the impossibility of their being deceived about it. But to speak at all of twelve men who are incapable of being deceived, and therefore infallible, is to put before us a greater wonder than the prodigies which they are supposed to attest. There is no need to go into the question of the possibility or impossibility of what may be called miracles, or prodigies, or by whatever other name we may choose. But we must remember that even in everyday life a vastly greater amount of evidence is needed for some incidents than for others, even though these may be physically quite possible. The statement that the Prime Minister had been seen walking about Trafalgar Square for hours unclothed to his waist would not be accepted on the mere asseveration of twelve or twenty upright men without a very rigorous scrutiny. Yet a certain amount of evidence would be received in proof of the fact, for the Prime Minister might have gone mad; but the testimony of a thousand known and upright men would not be accepted for the assertion that he had been at the same time carrying his head under his arm. To find twelve men who could not possibly be deceived about anything must be twelve times as difficult as to find one possessed of this infallibility. The rest of Paley's description is pure imagination. The so-called 'Acts of the Apostles' tells no such story, and indeed tells quite a different one. It cannot be too often repeated that with writers like Paley the truth of an alleged miracle means really the truth of the narrative of that miracle. They do not pretend, and indeed they would deny, that such things are, or may be, wrought in the Christian Church now, contradicting in this the general belief of Christendom, and especially of the Latin Churches; and for the

prodigies or wonders recorded in the Gospels and the Acts we have seen already that we have no contemporary attestation whatever. But all experience would show us that even if we had before us these twelve upright witnesses, we should find them at heart much more anxious for the promulgation of their spiritual convictions than for the acceptance of the extraordinary incidents of which they might yet have a full assurance. The story of the Acts reads us this lesson. The high priest and his partisans are clearly described as less anxious about the wonders than they are about the new teaching, which may tend to the subversion of the Mosaic law and polity. On the advice of Gamaliel they content themselves, accordingly, with forbidding the disciples to preach in the name of Jesus, and then let them go free (Acts v. 28, 40). But we are concerned here only with the ascertainment of historical facts; and we have seen not only that the twelve upright and unerring witnesses are not forthcoming, but that of the few who seem to be forthcoming we have no information which bears out the narratives made up about them. Paley may, perhaps, have been thinking of educated and intelligent Englishmen, although even amongst Englishmen the supply of such witnesses is not superabundant. His words are absurdly inapplicable to Jews of the first century, and to Galilæans, who are described as more ignorant, superstitious, and credulous than perhaps any peasantry in the world. Such men might act and speak under the strongest sense of duty; but, this being conceded, the questioning of their assurance as to the occurrence of some particular incident, and even the total disbelieve of it, would yet be no disparagement of their sincerity in the discharge of their spiritual duty, which, by universal admission, was that of preaching the Divine love and mercy for a struggling and suffering world.

For us the controversy is thus brought within narrow limits. A sharp line of demarcation is drawn by almost all traditional apologists and theologians between the wonders recorded in the New Testament Scriptures and all others. The latter are to be disregarded; the former are the indispensable credentials of the

Eternal Son. The question, why this should be so, may be permissible, or rather it is the first which, on coming face to face with such an assertion, calls imperatively for an answer; and it is quite certain that it cannot be answered except by an impartial examination of the evidence. All records of wonders are really historical narratives, if they are anything; but historical, or professedly historical, narratives coming from anonymous writers for whose statements there is no contemporary corroboration, are discredited at the outset, even if they relate incidents every one of which, taken separately, may be of the most commonplace character, and therefore antecedently quite credible. If these narratives abound with incidents to which as monstrous or prodigious we should antecedently give no credit whatever, then for us the inquiry is on every ground closed. But for those who insist that without miraculous testimony Christianity itself is overturned, nothing less can suffice than a judicial weighing of all the evidence adducible for all the wonders and prodigies which are said to have taken place in all ages of the history of the Christian Church. We may, therefore, well be at a loss to see on what grounds apologetic writers summarily reject, as calling for no consideration, the attestations of Augustine of Hippo to cases of raising of the physically dead from their graves, which, he says, occurred in his own time, in his own diocese, only a few months or a year or two before he wrote of them, and, as he declares, after a careful scrutiny of the facts. That they do so reject his testimony is certain. The narratives attested by Augustine are to be thrust aside. The stories of wonders in the New Testament Scriptures are to be accepted with full assurance of their reality. According to Paley, it is a question of credible witnesses. It is really a question of the trustworthiness of narratives which profess to tell us of those witnesses; and this is the question to which we have now to address ourselves.

CHAPTER IV

MIRACLES OR WONDERS IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

FROM all points of view but one the question of the trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives has, we may say, been fully answered already. We have seen that we have no evidence of the existence of any of our four Gospels in their present form for something like a century and a half after the occurrence of the events of which they profess to be a record. In other words, they are writings for which we have no contemporary attestation, and they are anonymous. We know neither when nor where nor by whom they were written, and we have abundant proof of early alterations of the text, as well as of insertions, interpolations, and additions. The books, in short, rest on no historical foundation whatever, unless we can find this foundation in the Acts of the Apostles. But an examination of this book has shown that every statement in it is in the highest degree suspicious. It professes to give an account of the relations of Paul with the apostles or missionaries of the church at Jerusalem, and this account flatly contradicts the narrative of the chief contemporary witness who can be cited for any part of the history of the first century,—the great apostle of the Gentiles himself. There is, indeed, but one other, and this is John the son of Zebedee, if he be, as it seems likely that he is, the author of the latest additions to the Apocalypse.

But this book, so far as it deals at all with these subjects, bears out the statements of Paul and wholly upsets the representations of the Acts. According to the Apocalypse, the relations of the

pillar apostles with Paul remained permanently antagonistic. The feeling expressed for him in the Apocalypse is one of aversion and disgust, in place of the smooth amenity pictured for us in the pages of the Acts. In the Apocalypse Paul is denounced as little better than an impostor; and it is utterly impossible that such language could be applied to him by one of the most prominent followers of the Great Master, if there be an atom of truth in the representations of the Acts. But we have seen that the history of the Acts was for the most part the creation of the writer as he went along in the fabrication of his story. We have seen that there is not the smallest reason for supposing that the Council of Jerusalem ever was held; and the tenor of the letter of Paul to the Galatians is decisive proof that he was not present at it, and that the decree of that Council is a fiction. We have seen, further, that it is impossible to regard the conversion of Cornelius, the trial and stoning of Stephen, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, and the power of speaking languages without having learned them, which is said to have been conferred on the disciples at Pentecost, as in any sense facts of history. The foundation, therefore, on which the historical credit of our canonical Gospels must rest is swept away and destroyed; and the Gospels are doubly discredited as claiming support from a book which can afford to them no support whatever.

It is the surest of all the canons of historical criticism that fidelity and accuracy in the relation of ordinary events is the true test of the credibility of any alleged historical narrative. The book may possibly be the only monument of a state of things of which we have no other record. It may be without attestation, because there was no contemporary literature to which the appeal could be made. But if it be self-consistent and seemingly veracious in the relation of ordinary events, a presumption, more or less strong, is created in favour of its trustworthiness. The tables, however, are immediately turned, if it be found in any part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and, still more, if we are introduced to a causation and sequence of events,

of which in the ordinary course of human life we have no experience.

But it is not on these extraordinary incidents that we first fix our attention. We may take as an example the history of Rome before the burning of the city by the Gauls. If we examine its chronology, we find that it is divided into three periods of precisely one hundred and twenty years each; that there were seven kings, whose reigns make up two of these periods; that the ending of the first period coincides with the middle year of the reign of the fourth king; and that the duration of all the reigns is determined by arithmetical considerations designed to support this scheme. This chronology Niebuhr denounces as throughout a forgery and a fiction, and the whole history stands condemned at the outset, before we bestow a thought on the astounding thaumaturgy which is one of its most prominent characteristics.

The narrative of the Acts of the Apostles has been tested by this canon, and has fallen before it in every particular. The holding of a Council, the passing of a decree, the conversion and baptism of a Gentile, the trial and death of a deacon, are not prodigies or wonders. They are incidents which might occur at any time or in any place; but we are driven, by reasons already drawn out, to the conclusion that they are all fictitious, and that the fictions, like those of the books of Chronicles in the Old Testament Scriptures, are deliberate. The whole narrative is thus convicted of falsehood; and the signs, wonders, and prodigies related in it vanish like mists dispersed and drawn up by the sun. It is, in strictness of speech, merely time wasted to examine each story separately. But, although the historical credibility of the book is lost irretrievably, it is well to bestow some attention on the mental and moral conditions under which these and other like narratives grew up. With all questions turning on the antecedent credibility or incredibility, possibility or impossibility, of miracles, portents, or by whatever names they may be called, we are happily not bound to deal. They do not in reality concern us in the least. If we see that all evidence fails us for every particular narrative

of miracles, the controversy is, in fact, ended. If, then, we touch such questions at all, it is not as a duty which we have to discharge so much as a concession to apologists who seem to find a satisfaction in surveying the superstructure of buildings without taking the trouble to examine their foundations.

In such books as these the commonest incidents become incredible, when we find, to say the least, deliberate misrepresentation at work for the furthering of a very definite purpose; and the case is made worse when we find in what an atmosphere, moral and intellectual, the framers of these narratives lived. In place of Paley's perfectly trustworthy and infallible witnesses, we have a number of uneducated or half-educated peasants, whose roughness and rudeness, materialism and intolerance, are on a par with their ignorance. In fact, there never was an age in which the most upright of men then living could be less depended on for the accuracy of their reports, or the correctness of their impressions, than was the age which we speak of as the apostolic, or any country more steeped in superstitious credulity than that in which the apostles or evangelists lived.¹ Among the Jews of

¹ The writer of the Preface to the tenth edition of *Lux Mundi* speaks of himself as *feeling* assured that 'in the apostles we have men who knew thoroughly the value of testimony and what depended upon it, who bore witness to what they had seen, and in all cases, save in the exceptional case of St. Paul, to what they had seen over a prolonged period of years' (p. xxxvii).

For these wonderful assertions we have not a shred of evidence. We have seen that of the apostles, or missionaries, with the exception of three, or, at the utmost, of four, we hear nothing and know nothing. The rest are to us mere names. The relations of Paul with the chiefs of the church at Jerusalem have been noticed with sufficient fulness; and the support which he is supposed to give to incidents mentioned in the Gospel narratives is obtained, as we shall see, from interpolated and spurious matter. What may be meant by 'a prolonged period of years' we are not told. In the Synoptics the ministry seems to be begun and ended in a few months: in the fourth Gospel it is extended apparently over two years. In either case the period is amazingly short, little or no time being allowed for anything. Thus, the mission of the Seventy seems to be over in a few days or weeks. If their work was one of spiritual reformation, the idea of such limits is absurd. But for chronology we shall search the Gospels in vain.

The writer of this Preface allows that 'in some ages testimony has been careless,—so careless, so clouded with superstition and credulity, as to be practically valueless.' To no ages do these words apply with greater force than to those during which the Gospels took shape. (See Note 1, page 126.)

that day, generally, wonders, in Dean Milman's words, 'wakened no emotion, or were speedily superseded by some new demand on the ever ready belief.'

This is the world,—now, happily, so astonishing to educated and thinking Englishmen,—into which we are introduced by theologians, who are so infatuated as to insist on raising their systems on foundations of sand. Christianity, they argue, is a supernatural revelation, and prophecy and miracles are the evidences of it. This is the assertion with which Bishop Butler starts, and this is the treacherous slough into which we find ourselves plunged, if we attempt to follow him. Our belief in the goodness of God, in his love for all sinners, in his will for the final healing of all who are diseased and plagued with sin, is to depend on the veracity of nameless historians, who tell us a number of astounding stories about marvellous draughts of fishes, or of the destruction of swine possessed by demons cast out from the bodies of lunatics. While Paley is deluding himself with imaginary pictures of trustworthy witnesses beyond reach of error or deception, we see before us a people besotted with magic, sorcery, astrology, demonology, and the science of dreams. As to the exercise of impartial judgement, there was none. Everything extraordinary was greedily believed for the moment, and therefore, of necessity, as rapidly forgotten. No real impression could be made upon the mind, and, in spite of assertions to the contrary, none was made. We fail to see this in reading the Gospel narratives, only because we do not take the trouble to think as we read. If we could but fix our attention on the matter, we should see the fiction in all its glaring nakedness. Mary and her husband are said to be deeply struck by the visit of the Magi and the story of the shepherds who tell them of the angels' song; and Mary especially, we are told, pondered these things in her heart. But she is not less astonished at the words of Simeon and Anna in the temple, although the words of the angel to herself at the time of the annunciation should have sufficed to fix her faith for ever in her own high destiny and in the divine mission of her Son. A few

years pass. The child disappears on their return from a passover in Jerusalem; and the temple, which should have been the first, is the last place where they seek him. On finding him there, Mary's words express, not thankfulness that her old faith and trust are being justified, but a reproach for the sorrow and trouble which his disappearance and the search entailed by it had caused them. The child's reply is just what should have occurred to herself. The wonder was that she should have sought him at all. That she should fail to know that he must be about his Father's business was evidence of a singular lack of faith. But her faith had sunk, seemingly, to a still lower ebb, when she countenanced his kinsfolk in their efforts to arrest his career on the ground that he was beside himself.

No doubt there is beauty and dignity in some at least of the narratives of miracles, portents, and prodigies in the Gospels. The coarser and more disgusting forms of Jewish superstition could not be made to harmonise with the character or the words of the Great Master to whom we owe the teaching of the sermons on the mount and on the plain. But the difference is strictly one of degree. All the types of Rabbinic or Talmudic superstition are to be found, softened down in whatever measure and refined, in the stories of the New Testament miracles, and they point to the gross and nauseating shapes which those superstitions would assume when better influences are wanting or have been removed. When we find a man like the great apostle of the Gentiles declaring that the offerings of the heathen are made to demons and not to God, and therefore implying by his words that the heathen deities were actual beings and not merely unsubstantial fictions, we may form some notion of the vast strength of the popular delusions on the subject of demonology.

These delusions are generally so disgusting that they can scarcely be touched on at all, and must be passed over with a dry foot. The book of Tobit brings before us the doings of the demon Asmodeus; and here, if we please, we may find an entrance into the elaborate hierarchy of angels and devils in which, after the

Babylonish exile, the Jews generally seem to have found an infinite satisfaction. No fancies could be too puerile or ridiculous to be rejected from this farrago of so-called theology; or, rather, the more degraded and debased the notions, the more likely were they to find favour. The whole air was filled with angels, good and bad, whose offices were described with all the fulness and precision of an Ordnance Map. Diseases of all kinds were the work of evil demons, by whom the patients were possessed; and the casting out of these demons was the special function of the exorcist. That the evangelists ascribed this power, and the exercise of it, to Jesus of Nazareth, is a patent fact. That he claimed either to possess it or to exercise it does not follow, and is not proved. Many or most of these contemptible delusions are shared not merely by fanatics like Tertullian, but by more sober thinkers like Origen and Eusebius.

Each of these superstitions was drawn out into detail with the exactitude of scientific system; and we have here the development as well as the source of the horrors which come from the notions of sorcery, magic, and witchcraft. Those who practised those arts were not fit to live; and who is there who may not be practising them? The seemingly innocent may be the most guilty; and any means may be employed for ascertaining whether they are guilty or not. The sluices of the great stream were opened wide, and Christian Churches and States have deluged the earth with blood by way of extirpating the wizard and the witch. The conviction of the reality of these delusions was alive and strong among ourselves almost as yesterday; and here and there apologetic writers, like Archbishop Trench, can be found to uphold them still. In truth, there is no other ground on which the historical credit of our canonical Gospels can be sustained; and Archbishop Trench is at least consistent in holding to it. Dean Milman asserts that the theory of possession stands self-condemned in the eyes of modern thinkers generally as a kind of insanity: Dr. Trench sees that, if it be abandoned as such, the whole thau-maturgy of the New Testament Scriptures is smitten at one blow. He asks what any one of the apostles would think if he were to

enter a modern madhouse. There can be no doubt that the apostle would regard all the patients as possessed; but this would carry no weight with physicians now-a-days, and goes no way towards proving the soundness of the theory then; and with the discrediting of this theory, by far the greater number of the New Testament miracles are, as Dr. Trench saw, discredited also.

This, then, was the atmosphere in which the stories of the miracles, which Bishop Butler professed to regard as the very corner-stone of Christianity, grew up and were multiplied. They were fostered by the stagnant waters of the mighty marsh in which the human intellect was for the time lost. The crop of fictions was inexhaustible in its luxuriance; but the plants which it produced were, we are told, of various kinds. Some were good; some were bad. Some spread death; others might give life. How, then, were those of the one class to be distinguished from the other? For those who assert the trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives the matter is inexpressibly serious; and the difficulty is aggravated by the fact that the traditional apologists give two wholly contradictory answers to the question. That the one set of wonders are as real as the rest they all affirm with equal assurance. If we follow Dr. Trench, we must hold that 'side by side with the miracles which serve for the furthering of the kingdom of God runs another line of wonders, the counter-working of him who is ever the ape of the Most High.' Nor can we resist his conclusion that this fact 'is itself sufficient evidence that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and finally in proof of the doctrine which the worker of them proclaims.'¹ The doctrine must first be brought before the bar of the conscience; and not until it has passed this ordeal is the miracle which attests it to be received. It is not a question of fact. The miracles wrought for an evil purpose are as real as those which are designed for the furtherance of truth; and if it seem to us that the teacher who does the wonder is leading us into error, then, Dr. Trench warns us that 'not all the miracles in the world have a right to demand

¹ *Notes on the Miracles*, p. 25.

submission to the word which they seal.' In short, the appeal is after all not to the miracles but to something else. Dr. Newman is even more precise, and, not being hampered by the self-imposed trammels of Dr. Trench, he is also more logical. Dr. Trench could not bring himself to assert that no true miracles ever occurred apart from those which are recorded in the New Testament Scriptures; but neither could he bring himself to state candidly that miracles may be wrought still. He takes refuge, therefore, in the fancy (for it is nothing more) that the power of working them was withdrawn when these 'props and strengthenings of the infant plant' were no longer needed. The withdrawal, however, was gradual, the power becoming virtually extinct by subdivision, as the number of the Christian churches and of their members multiplied, until in place of it was left the organised catholic Church, the greatest miracle of all. With such imaginings as these Dr. Newman would have nothing to do; and from the facts before him he concludes emphatically 'that there was no age of miracles after which miracles ceased; that there have been at all times true miracles and false miracles, true accounts and false accounts; that no authoritative guide is supplied to us for distinguishing between the two.'

In strictness of speech, then, miracles, even in the judgement of those who accept them, have, as such, no evidential value. It is quite possible that in any given instance the attempt to use them as such may involve a mistake. Dr. Newman evidently felt the difficulty. That there are counterfeit miracles is for him beyond doubt. His only method of meeting the difficulty, or rather of evading it, is by expressing his belief that God 'will never suffer them to be so counterfeited as to deceive the humble inquirer.' Dr. Mozley can allow no such concession, as this would be to admit certain pretensions advanced by the Church of Rome; and virtually his position is that there are no true miracles apart from those which are recorded in the Scriptures of the New Testament Canon. He is, therefore, driven to the really absurd conclusion that the New Testament miracles are, and must be,

readily distinguishable from the great multitude of miracles, which are inseparable from the mental growth of average humanity. If they are not, then, he insists, 'there is an end to the proof of a revelation by miracles.'¹ If they are, we have still to see 'whether the Christian miracles are thus distinguishable, and whether their nature, their object, and their evidence vindicate their claim to this distinctive truth and divine source.'

But it is indisputable that we can have no evidence for any fact except from those who have seen that fact. The miracles which Dr. Mozley looks upon as evidential (*i.e.* true) miracles took place nearly two millenniums ago. Whatever evidence we may have of them must come, then, from some records; and, according to Dr. Mozley, before we can decide on the value of the miracle we have by a careful inquiry to satisfy ourselves as to the nature and authority of the record. Why not then begin with this examination of the records, and of the testimony on which they rest? This is precisely what we have done; and the result has been to strip the Gospels of all credit as historical narratives. But Dr. Mozley enters on no such inquiry. His method is of another sort, and may save a good deal of trouble for those who do not object to following a guide without ascertaining whither he means to lead them. In fact, apologists like Dr. Mozley will do anything rather than honestly look into the grounds on which authority is claimed for the narratives of the New Testament Scriptures. It is comparatively an easy matter to discredit the great mass of what are known as ecclesiastical miracles, this being the name assigned to all miracles except those of which we have a record in our canonical books. Speaking of some so-called heretics of his day, Irenæus says, 'so far are they from raising the dead (as the Master raised them, and the apostles by prayer, and as in the brotherhood frequently through the constraining power of prayer offered by the whole church of the place with much fasting and supplication, the spirit of the dead has come back and the man has been given back to the prayers of the saints), that they do not believe

¹ Bampton Lectures, p. 208.

that this can be done.'¹ This passage Dr. Mozley summarily sets aside with the remark that 'the reference is so vague that it possesses but little weight as testimony.' Yet if the utterances of Irenæus be worth anything, no statement could well be more explicit or more decisive. Irenæus here affirms that not once or twice, but often, bodies physically dead have through the prayers of the church been reanimated by the spirits which had abandoned them. This is enough. Of details we have no need. The question is whether Irenæus speaks the truth or whether he does not. To dwell on the paucity of incidents, as though this had anything to do with the real issue, is an unworthy course for an English theologian of the nineteenth century. It is not as though Irenæus were the only early writer who makes such assertions, nor as though the New Testament narratives furnished us with much more elaborate illustrations. At the outside our four canonical Gospels bring before us only three instances of such reanimation of physically dead bodies. Of these three one is peculiar to the Johannine Gospel; and the narrative of it is indeed marked by singular vividness of colouring and multiplicity of detail. Of this narrative we shall have more to say further on. Whatever it be, we have already seen that it cannot be regarded as sober history. In the Synoptic Gospels we have only the reanimating of the body of the daughter of Jairos, if indeed we are to regard it as such, in the teeth of the words ascribed to Jesus himself, that the damsel was not dead, but only sleeping, *i.e.* in a swoon. The only other case is the reanimating of the body of the widow's son at Nain in the third Gospel; and of this the other three evangelists know nothing, while in the same way all the three synoptics know nothing of the raising of Lazarus.

But, to say nothing of other wonders, we have a number of marvels recorded by Augustine of Hippo, who evidently felt that too great stress could not be laid upon them; and, to establish Dr. Mozley's conclusions, these marvels must be explained away or discredited. Dr. Mozley, therefore, insists broadly that 'in

¹ *Adv. Hær.* ii. 31. 2, cited by Eusebius, *H. E.* v. 7.

the preface which Augustine prefixes to his list he cannot be said even to profess to guarantee the truth or accuracy of the different instances contained in it.' But, in truth, this preface, coming from a man living at the time, and in such a position,—from one, moreover, who stakes his own personal credit on the truth of the alleged facts, attaches to these marvels a weight of testimony which is wholly lacking to the narratives of our evangelists. There is, indeed, no small force in the words of Augustine. To the question why the wonders recorded in the New Testament writings are not occurring still, he replies that in fact they are. 'I might answer,' he says, 'that miracles were necessary before the world believed, in order that the world might believe. Any one who now requires miracles in order that he may believe is himself a great miracle, in not believing what all the world believes.' That his argument really struck at the continuance of miracles he seems not to have seen, and perhaps he did not care to see it. But he freely admits that wonders occurring in his own day stand at a disadvantage as compared with those recorded in the four Gospels. The later prodigies, he says, 'are not brought under the same strong light as that which caused the former to be noised abroad with so much glory, inasmuch as the Canon of sacred Scriptures, which must be definite, causes those miracles to be everywhere publicly read and become firmly fixed in the memory of all peoples.' Miracles now-a-days, he adds, are known only in small circles, especially if the population of a city be large. Mentioning the case of a physician at Hippo, he asks who knows it, and adds, 'We, nevertheless, do know it, and a few brethren to whose knowledge it may have come.' This is, clearly, a personal attestation such as we do not possess for any single miracle recorded in the Scriptures of the New Testament Canon. He writes, he tells us, within two years of the time when the incidents occurred: some of them happened in his own presence; others, as to which he felt doubtful, he investigated. The narratives of all of them had been drawn up that they might be read in the churches of his diocese; but he could scarcely, he acknowledges,

hope for wider publication, and without this he could not expect them to be generally accepted. The truth is that all cities and all lands were overburdened each with its own harvest of wonders, and that prodigies of all kinds were practically drugs in the market.

As to Augustine's narratives, some of them are given in two or three sentences, or in a few words, the stories of cures being related with more detail than those of the reanimation of dead bodies. This is just what we might expect. In cases of resurrection the mere statement of the fact is all that is really wanted; and we have little more than this in the story of the widow's son at Nain, or of the daughter of Iaeiros,—in short, nothing which serves in any way to attest the truth of the miracle or wonder. The writing of Augustine is genuine. Of the Gospels, two are not even professedly apostolic, and none has any contemporary attestation. On every ground the evidence of the miracles of which Augustine speaks is enormously stronger than that which we have for any of the wonders related in the canonical writings of the New Testament. Yet Dr. Mozley can reject this evidence without the slightest hesitation, while with equal assurance he accepts that of the Gospels as beyond all doubt conclusive. So mighty is the force of foregone conclusions.

That Augustine, seeing that miracles were no longer needed for the purposes of inspiring faith or strengthening it, should thus stake his own credit on the reality of the wonders which he records, may be, and is, sufficiently astonishing. The fact that he did so cannot be questioned; and the information which we receive incidentally from his statements is most instructive. The great enemy which baffles him is the carelessness, if not the apathy, of the people on the subject. They see or hear, believe, and straightway forget. It is, in short, the very picture drawn for us by Dean Milman. 'Even in places,' says Augustine, 'where care is taken, as is now the case amongst us, that accounts of those who receive benefit should be publicly read, those who are present hear them only once, and many are not present at all, the result

being that those who are present retain after a few days no memory of what they have heard, and scarcely one can be found able to give an account of what he had heard to those who had not been there.' Wonders were, in fact, we must repeat, immensely too common; and heedlessness to all wonders was the penalty paid for it. We have only to look through any three or four memoirs in the Bollandist 'Deeds of the Saints' to understand how inevitable must be this issue. There is a large parading of what looks like evidence; but it consists chiefly of small details, and, as we read, we pass them by with a sensation of monotony which effectually prevents these details from making the faintest impression on our minds.

Yet, standing on a foundation so utterly rotten; admitting that 'Jewish supernaturalism was going on side by side with our Lord's miracles;'¹ knowing that wonders of the same kind, and in many cases virtually identical, had, long before the Christian era, been ascribed to the Vedic and other Aryan deities; seeing fully that heathenism 'had its running stream of supernatural pretension in the shape of prophecy, exorcism, and the miraculous cures of diseases which the temples of Esculapius recorded with pompous display;'² admitting that an examination of their evidence, altogether beyond the power of any except those who have learning and leisure, ought to precede the acceptance of any miracles; and knowing, finally, that even the good or right miracles could guide men only to truths which, in Augustine's words, they should be able to receive without them—Dr. Mozley can still speak of these useless crutches as the indispensable supports of the spiritual life. That it should be so is indeed astonishing. Mahomet, it seems, agreed largely with Augustine, although sundry stories of marvels have found their way into the Koran; and Mahomet is, therefore, denounced and dismissed as having 'an utterly barbarous

¹ Bampton Lectures, 209.

² Why a benefit received in the second or third century B.C. should not be acknowledged with thankfulness by the receiver, or why his acknowledgement of it should be set down to the mere love of pompous display, it is not easy to see.

idea of evidence and a total miscalculation of the claims of reason,' whereas Jesus, with a true 'foresight of the permanent need of evidence,' admitted 'the inadequacy of his own mere word, and the necessity of a rational guarantee to his revelation of his own nature and commission.'¹ The profanity of apologetic theologians is, no doubt, unintentional; but it is sometimes considerable.

The question of the evidential value of miracles has brought us into a surging sea of fancies, fictions, and delusions. But the greatest delusion is the conviction that this tossing ocean is dry land. This is the conviction of Bishop Butler when he asserts it to be 'an acknowledged historical fact' that Christianity 'offered itself to the world and demanded to be received upon the allegation of miracles . . . publicly wrought to attest the truth of it; and Christianity, including the dispensation of the Old Testament, seems distinguished by this from all other religions.'² These last words imply the presence of a certain amount of doubt which he would have done well to carry into other portions of his inquiry. Had he done so, he would scarcely have bewildered himself or his hearers with the idea of layers of miracle on the ground that one was needed to give support to the rest.³ Butler had a peculiar dislike to define the terms of which he made use, and a peculiar knack of evading the duty. Hence of miracle he says that 'the notion of a miracle, considered as a proof of a divine mission, has been stated with great exactness by divines, and is, I think, sufficiently understood by every one.' In the next sentence the term *incarnation* is used after the like sort without any definition. 'There are also,' he says, 'invisible miracles, the Incarnation of Christ, for instance, which, being secret, cannot be alleged as proof of such a mission, but require themselves to be proved by visible miracles.'⁴ But Butler feels no call to specify the visible miracles wrought for the special purpose of proving that Jesus was not the Son of Joseph. Paley commits the same sin of using terms without defining them, when he asks, 'In what way can a revela-

¹ Bampton Lectures, p. 32.

² See Appendix E.

³ *Analogy*, Part ii. chap. vii. § 3.

⁴ *Analogy*, Part ii. chap. ii. § 1.

tion be made except by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive.' This depends entirely on the meaning attached to the term revelation. If the unfolding be that of traditional or ecclesiastical Christianity, the question may be fitly put, and admits only of Paley's answer; but the connotation so assigned to the term is absolutely false.

The words of Dr. Newman are on this point not less indistinct. 'A revelation,' he tells us, 'that is, a direct message from God to man, itself bears in some degree a miraculous character.' But what is a direct message? and what is the measure in which it has a miraculous or wonderful character? It was a revelation,—in Professor Max Müller's words, 'the greatest of all revelations,'—when the idea of God as the Father of all took shape in the human mind. That assuredly was a direct message or communication from mind to mind. The unfolding which is supposed to come by means of prodigies, which very few have seen or can see, and which have not been recorded when and where they occurred, seems to be a very indirect message indeed, and as circuitous as it is obscure and perplexing.

Again we are brought back to the conclusion that traditional apologists rest their case on histories which are fictions, or on statements to which they themselves attach a false meaning. Dr. Mozley draws a picture of Jesus as uttering within the courts of the temple the long series of discourses which are put into his mouth in our fourth Gospel; and then, having given his own colouring to much or most of this teaching, he asks what would be the inevitable conclusion drawn by a sober hearer about a person so speaking. He answers that a judicial thinker could only regard such a person as disordered in his understanding,¹ and that, hence, miracles are the necessary complement of such announcements as those which he supposes Jesus in those discourses to have made,

¹ Virtually, therefore, Dr. Mozley is asserting for himself, as a sober reader and as a judicial thinker, that if these stories of healing at the pool of Bethesda and elsewhere had not come down to him, he would himself regard the speaker of the discourses ascribed to Jesus in the fourth Gospel as 'a person disordered in his understanding.'

—the announcements without these miracles being purposeless and abortive.¹ We have already had abundant proof that these discourses never were uttered, as they are here given, and that they are virtually creations of the evangelist as he composed his narrative.² But we will for the moment concede that the narrative is historical, and that Jesus might have been heard so speaking. We are not told that signs or prodigies preceded or accompanied these discourses. Many of those who heard them may not have had an opportunity of either seeing or hearing of such attesting signs or wonders; and all such persons, until they saw or heard of them, and were satisfied of their reality and the purpose for which they were wrought, would, according to Dr. Mozley himself, be fully justified in regarding him as a man of disordered mind, and would indeed be bound and compelled to do so. By the hypothesis these men had not seen the evidential miracles which were yet in the future; and therefore, for the time being, these announcements were for them ‘purposeless and abortive.’ This astounding conclusion is involved in the words of Dr. Mozley himself. But how could such a marvel as the cure of the blind man, or of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, attest, even for those who saw them, the truth of discourses which were not uttered at the same place or at the same time? But, indeed, for these and for all other miracles, as they are called, we have no evidence whatever. The historical credit of the Gospels depends on the trustworthiness of the Acts of the Apostles, and the history of the Acts is discredited and put out of court by the apostle Paul himself. The alleged prodigies have never occurred, and all arguments founded on the notion that they might have occurred are clean thrown away. With the antecedent possibility or impossibility of signs and wonders we have no concern.

But apologetic critics force us to mark that there is even

¹ Bampton Lectures, p. 14.

² The argument is in no way affected, if it be urged that these discourses are set down as representations of preachings, imperfectly remembered, and in great part, if not wholly, misunderstood.

greater confusion and perplexity in the matter than we had thus far noticed. Some of them, as we have seen, insist that there is a broad distinction, marked and prominent, between the Gospel miracles and all others, and that the latter, having no evidential value, may be cast aside as so much superfluous rubbish. In giving their widest generalisations they speak as though the differences of character between the two classes would be manifest even to a child. But when they are (as they cannot fail to be) driven into particulars, their tone is altered, and we find that the spirit of doubt which has led them to reject the vast crowd of miracles of all ages and countries, has been at work in their minds on not a few, if not on the greater number, of the miracles recorded in the New Testament writings also. Dr. Mozley, for instance, admits that, when he speaks of the New Testament miracles, he means only some of them; and seemingly he is thinking of only three or four. The majority of them belong, he allows, to the classes known as *ambiguous*,—‘cures, visions, expulsions of evil spirits;’ but he denies that this circumstance affects the character of the Gospel miracles as a body, ‘because we judge of the body or whole from its highest specimens, not from its lowest.’ He specifies two, ‘*e.g.* our Lord’s resurrection and ascension;’ and to these he would, of course, add the secret miracle of the Incarnation, although Butler, as we have seen, is so far from regarding this as of any evidential value, that he looks upon it as needing to be attested by other signs or wonders. For the sake of these miracles, therefore, and for these only, does Dr. Mozley, it would seem, enter on an elaborate argument which logically calls upon us to put faith in hundreds or in thousands; and this he does, only because he will regard the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension (if we must use Latin terms), not as spiritual truths and realities, but as sensible or physical, *i.e.* historical, incidents or facts. But for this the whole question would become clear; but the veil is still as effectually drawn over Christianity generally, when miracles are mentioned, as it was upon the eyes of the Jews on the reading of the law of Moses; and in the meantime

apologists belonging to the Church of England heap up sophistical reasons which are to justify them in rejecting as much as they like of the thaumaturgy of the New Testament Scriptures.

They are, no doubt, justified in rejecting what they put aside ; but not on the grounds which they allege. It is not true that all the miracles of the Church are more ambiguous than those of the Gospels. Dr. Mozley is bound to assert this, or to imply it as forcibly as he can. Dr. Newman is explicit enough on the other side. Although he allows that the miracles of 'Scripture' have on the whole 'a peculiar dignity and beauty,' they have it, he insists, 'only as a whole,' while some of them 'are inferior in these respects to certain ecclesiastical miracles, and are received only on the credit of the system of which they form part.'¹ In other words, it is only because they are found in certain books that they are believed at all. As to evidence, we are warranted in saying now, that for the Gospel miracles we have none ; for those narrated by Augustine we have the testimony of a truthful man, who declares that he had sifted the cases thoroughly within a year or two after the occurrence of the events.² But whether in the New Testament narratives of miracles, or in any others, there is nothing new, nothing original. The same incidents are said to have taken place all over the Aryan world, and beyond it ; and even the most honest thinkers passively acquiesced in them, and so encouraged the credulity of more vulgar minds. As for the earlier Christian literature, it was honeycombed with pious frauds. In the emphatic words of Dean Milman, 'To deceive into Christianity was so valuable a service as to hallow deceit itself. . . . The Christian lived in a supernatural world : the notion of the Divine power, the perpetual interference of the Deity, the agency of the countless invisible beings which hovered over mankind, was so strongly impressed upon the belief that every extraordinary and almost every ordinary incident became a miracle, every inward

¹ *Essays on Miracles*, p. 160.

² Why could he not have sifted each case as it occurred, without the loss of a month or of a week ?

emotion a suggestion either of a good or an evil spirit. A mythic period was thus gradually formed, in which reality melted into fable, and invention unconsciously trespassed on the province of history.¹

Thus, according not only to Dean Milman, but to Dr. Mozley himself, the gospel miracles are accepted or tolerated only for the sake of a few, which are supposed to constitute the highest class, and which in fact stand apart by themselves. But although we have this admission in one place, in others we have statements which demand our acknowledgement of all on grounds involving the most amazing perversion or invention of facts. 'Christianity,' Dr. Mozley has the boldness to assert, 'is the religion of the civilised world, and it is believed upon its miraculous evidence.' It is judicious, no doubt, to lay this down at starting; but he does not add here that by its 'miraculous evidence' he means only an extremely small part of it. Instead of doing this, he goes on to describe a state of things which, if true, would be astonishing indeed. That miracles, wonders, and prodigies should be believed by ignorant and superstitious people in a rude age is, he says, likely enough, 'because it is easy to satisfy those who do not inquire.' But this, he maintains, 'is not the state of the case which we have to meet on the subject of the Christian miracles' (*i.e.* of all, or almost all, of them). 'The Christian, being the most intelligent, the civilised portion of the world, these miracles are accepted by the Christian body as a whole, by the thinking and educated, as well as the uneducated part of it, and the gospel is believed upon that evidence.'²

It is not pleasant to be put off with imaginary pictures when we think that we are dealing with facts of history, and when we wish only to ascertain them. Dr. Mozley's language, if we give any heed to it, would actually lead us to believe that there is not, and that there has not been, any conflict between religion and science, and that, in fact, all men of scientific training of any sort have been always the most enthusiastic believers in the extra-

¹ *History of Christianity*, iii. 358.

² Bampton Lectures, p. 27.

ordinary incidents of the Gospel narratives. These wonderful stories, indeed, are the ground for accepting the gospel at all; and the stories are credited by them just because they are educated and thinking men—in other words, because they have carefully and impartially examined them, and found the evidence for them adequate. This must mean that they have, each and all, gone through the whole historical inquiry which we have felt ourselves bound to undertake. The whole history of Christendom contradicts this astounding delusion. Christianity, such as it then was, was imposed on the Empire, and from that time to this has been maintained by the force of an organised hierarchy. Attempts at inquiry have been generally repressed, so far as they could be repressed with safety. 'Wherever men have thought, they have felt, if they have not expressed, their doubts; and these doubts have long since swelled into open revolt among the thinkers and critics of the Continent generally. In the English Church, or among English nonconformists, belief for the most part comes by inheritance, and Englishmen generally do not much care, for sundry weighty reasons, to pry too closely into things which at present they would be afraid to reject openly. In short, Christianity is not believed on account of these marvels. The marvels seem to be accepted simply because they are recorded in narratives which are regarded as authoritative. For the multitude, inquiry has not yet begun. When they fairly go into the matter for themselves, a great change will be imminent. On the thinkers of the present day it depends whether that change shall be steady reformation or fierce revolution.

If, finally, it be asked how such narratives grew up, we may reply that virtually the answer has been given already. The degrading superstition of the Jews, their eager greed for the marvellous, the concrete character of Eastern language, the materialism of Eastern thought, would account sufficiently for the multiplication of such stories. Many of the features by which they are characterised are found all over the world; and they belong to that common mythology which has coiled itself by a parasitic growth

round the person of the teacher of Nazareth, as it has round that of the British Arthur or of Charles the Great. Every metaphor employed by such a teacher would be translated into concrete fact; and the teaching of Jesus necessarily abounded with such metaphors. Looking at the Gospels superficially, we should say that he was simply, or chiefly, a thaumaturge, and that he gave nothing but missions of thaumaturgy to his apostles or disciples generally. They are to heal all diseases and infirmities, to cleanse the lepers, to give hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind, to make the lame walk, and to raise the dead. This was substantially the charge twice or thrice given to the twelve, and again to the seventy. We may say that these were commissions expressly for the performance of physical or material prodigies; but if we do, we shall be plunging into that debasing superstition which in every age has sapped the intellectual life of Christendom. We shall also be doing our best to lower the character of the Great Master himself; and we shall be doing so without a shadow of excuse. If we find that in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is constantly rebuking his followers for their stupid and unconquerable materialism, we must see how such commissions would be misunderstood, if not by those who received, yet by those who recorded, them; and if so, then we cannot fail to perceive that Jesus spoke of spiritual cures and spiritual healing wrought on the spiritually leprous, lame, deaf, blind, and dead, and that his followers were charged to bestow these blessings on others as freely as they had received them themselves. The mental atmosphere of the age transmuted these merciful works of spiritual cleansing into prodigies astounding to the bodily senses; and the records which we speak of as the Gospel histories are the result. The reversing of the process will show us clearly how these narratives took shape.¹

See Appendix A.

CHAPTER V

THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

IN our Gospel narratives of the conception, birth, and infancy of Jesus, we find two distinct sets of legends which, except in the one idea of representing his birth as not preceded by ordinary generation, can scarcely be said to have a single point of agreement. Nay, more, the one set absolutely excludes the other, by making the actors present at distant places in distant countries at the same time; by introducing conflicting motives, and sequences of events to suit those motives, while in the few references to really historical characters the writers fall into contradictions which betray the nature of their materials. The need of accounting for the presence of Joseph and Mary at Bethlehem leads the writer of the third Gospel to speak of the census of Quirinus, and so to antedate it by some ten years, while he represents Herod the Great as either knowing nothing of, or giving no heed to, the birth of the king whom in the first Gospel he seeks to discover only in order that he may destroy. The falsification is precisely the same in kind as that by which the writer of the Gospel of Nicodemus throws the narrative of the crucifixion into the form of a report from Pilate to the Emperor Tiberius.

But the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus was one of a large family. The preface to the third Gospel tells us that the name of such writings was *legion*, while the self-styled author, claiming seemingly for himself greater diligence and care in the sifting and arrangement of his materials, no more claims for himself the

character of an eye-witness than he concedes it to the writers whose Gospels we must suppose that he had some wish to supersede.

Yet when the contradictions running through the narratives of the birth and infancy of Jesus are fully laid bare; when it is shown that we have the testimony neither of twelve independent witnesses nor of four independent evangelists; that a series of events described in precisely the same words cannot possibly have been so described at starting by different writers; that our Gospels do not belong to the earliest stratum of Christian literature; that there is a system in some of the omissions or variations in the story, and that thus the narratives of the conception and birth have no place in the fourth Gospel, the last resort of those who would maintain the historical authority of those records is to what is called the Canon. These Gospels, they say, have received the authoritative sanction of the Church; they have been selected out of a vast number of spurious writings, and for them we have the irrefragable testimony of an uninterrupted line of witnesses from the apostolic age itself.

It is easier to assert than to prove. But we may content ourselves with the admissions of traditional theologians, if we would know the nature of the works which they have undertaken to defend. 'It is certainly remarkable,' says Dr. Westcott, now Bishop of Durham, 'that in the controversies of the second century, which often turned upon disputed readings of the Scriptures, no appeal was made to the Apostolic Writings,' while 'it does not appear that any special care was taken in the first age to preserve the books of the New Testament from the various injuries of time, or to insure perfect accuracy of transcription. They were given as a heritage to man, and it was some time before man felt the full value of the gift. The original copies seem to have soon perished.'

The admissions are fatal. If no appeal was made to the apostolic originals of the Scriptures, it is equally true that not a word is said about the existence of these originals. If it appears

that no special care was taken to preserve the books of the New Testament writings intact, the assertion is justified that, so far as we know, no care was taken at all. To say that 'the original copies seem to have soon perished' is to confess that we know nothing even of the existence of these originals, and are, therefore, still less able to say when they perished, or whether they ever perished at all. Things non-existent cannot disappear.

The last position of the defenders of the canonical books is that we have a series of testimonies from trustworthy writers in their favour, together with express statements that a Canon of the New Testament writings was known and acknowledged in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Meliton, bishop of Sardeis, we are told, was perfectly well acquainted with such a Canon, although, unfortunately, he has forgotten to specify any of the books which were contained in it. On this subject enough perhaps has been said already.¹ In the passage referred to by the Bishop of Durham, Meliton of Sardeis not only says not one word about any New Testament writings, but indirectly admits his astonishing ignorance of the books of the Old Testament. In truth, in his day the phrase 'New Testament' had not changed its meaning from the days of the apostle Paul. It denoted simply the new covenant (*foedus*) made by God with his people in place of the old one which was decaying and ready to vanish away. No one will venture to say that the words used in the institution of the Eucharist according to the first three Gospels had reference to a series of written volumes. No one will dare to suggest that Paul was referring to the books from Matthew's Gospel to the Apocalypse of John as they appear in our Canon, when not one of them, probably, with the exception of his own epistles, had been written.

Whatever testimonies, therefore, may be produced in favour of any of our books, Bishop Westcott himself interposes a momentous reservation in the way of an unquestioning acceptance of them. 'Express statements of readings which are found in some of the most ancient Christian writers are indeed the first evidence which

¹ See *supra*, p. 98.

we have, and are consequently of the highest importance. But until the last quarter of the second century this source of information fails us.' The alleged quotations which belong, or are said to belong, to an earlier time are of such a kind that, in the words of Bishop Herbert Marsh, 'the authors might have written them, though they had never seen the book or books to which they are supposed to allude.' Some of these quotations are clearly made from writings or traditions which point to an earlier stage of thought than that even of the Synoptic Gospels. This is the case in the account given of the baptism of Jesus by Justin Martyr. But, as we have seen, neither Justin nor the so-called apostolic fathers (Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, etc.) make reference to any of the Gospels by name; and to a large extent the writings of these fathers belong, not less than the Gospels, to the pseudonymous literature of the early Christian ages. It is needless to add anything further on this subject of their genuineness, as few are eager in their defence, and as their authority, even if undisputed, might furnish some slight evidence for the existence of writings bearing an indefinite resemblance to our Gospels, but none for the existence of those Gospels in their present form.

From the close of the second century there is, indeed, no dearth of testimony in favour of four (and it may be our four) Gospels. But they come from men who, like Irenæus, maintained that by no possibility could there be more than four, because there are four quarters of the earth, and four principal winds, and the Church, which is the central pillar of the truth, must send her quickening breath to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south. They come from men who were eager to welcome the most clumsy forgeries; who, like Eusebius, could put faith in the letter of Jesus to Abgaros of Edessa; who received as indisputably genuine the Sibylline rhapsodies which, professing to be composed ages before the birth of the Messiah, contained verses exhibiting acrostic initials of his name. But the supposed testimony even of Sibyls in the days of Tarquin was not without its value; and Christian Fathers scrupled not to make use of forged verses, as they scrupled

not to say that Luke, knowing himself to be in the wrong and Matthew in the right, invented a series of links in his genealogy to suit theories of moral propriety which objected to include sinners in a pedigree.

But it may be urged that we have the authority of those who, winnowing the wheat from the chaff, separated the apocryphal from the canonical Gospels. It is for those who appeal to such authority to show who these men were, not by mere assertions but by clear and cogent evidence. The task of so doing seems to be given up as desperate even by those who would most heartily desire to accomplish it. When a zealous defender of the canonical writings feels compelled to say that the authority attributed to the New Testament 'seems to have grown up without any one being able to place his finger upon the place or moment when adhesion to it was first yielded,' we may be sure that the suggestion of a supposed probability veils a hard and significant fact.

But to go on laying stress on such pleas, or on the refutation of them, is to approach too near to what logicians call *ignoratio elenchi*. We are really diverting the question to a false issue. We are using, or allowing others to use, high-sounding phrases, the employment of which is much like attempts to browbeat, when persuasion is of no avail. It matters not whether we see an incipient Canon in the second century, or one fully and exactly drawn out in the fourth. In either case the books stand exactly where they stood before. The judgement of the Nicene or any other Council might get rid of much that is coarse, gross, repulsive, or grotesque; but it can do nothing towards dealing with difficulties for the solution of which we have no evidence. It will not tell us when, where, or by whom any book was written, and it will not make a single sentence trustworthy which had been, or may be, rejected as unhistorical or false. The appeal is made to authority, and to authority only; and by all lovers of truth the appeal will be firmly set aside. Whatever be the decision of an ecclesiastical or any other assembly, the questions of the truth of the journey into Egypt and the abode at Nazareth

must be settled on purely historical grounds; and to settle them (if they can be settled) is the task of the historical critic, not of the theologian.¹

¹ The most candid admissions as to the value of the Canon made during the last thirty years have come from Dr. Irons, in his work on '*The Bible and its Interpreters*.' Briefly, he alleged its worthlessness as a conclusive reason for submitting ourselves to an infallible external authority. Maintaining straightforwardly that we know nothing of the evangelists, of the time when, or of the places in which the Gospels were written, that these narratives cannot be harmonised, or their texts relied on, he nevertheless avowed the conviction that we can, and ought to, trust ourselves to the authority of the Church, which insists on our acceptance of these narratives and of the teaching built upon them. Your Canon, he said in effect, is worthless; your sacred books contradict each other and themselves; you can never appeal to them with success in the battle against historical criticism; but you must believe; without faith or trust you can have no peace; the belief in the Bible as a series of consistent historical records is gone never to return; but you can believe in the Church, and on her authority you can accept that which as critics you are bound to reject.

The boldness of this pleading failed to reconcile traditionalists to its imprudence, and, practically, the book was withdrawn from circulation.—Cox, *Life of Bishop Colenso*, ii. 84.

BOOK II

THE NATIVITY

CHAPTER I

THE GENEALOGIES OF THE FIRST AND THIRD GOSPELS

A CRITICAL task once undertaken must be worked out in its most minute and, as it might seem, trivial details. Not a few, perhaps, might be well pleased if the genealogies in the Gospels bearing the names of Matthew and Luke could be set aside upon the plea that the Christian life has many a higher duty than that of groping into records, the truth or the falsity of which is a matter of no moment. But this is a mere begging of the question. On the face of them, these genealogies nowhere, except in one single phrase, give the least sign that the compilers regarded these records as insignificant or unimportant. The first record is formally set forth as the book of the generations of Jesus Christ from David and Abraham, and therefore claims all the authority which such a title can bestow. The third Gospel alone inserts two words,¹ which call the whole list into question. If Jesus was the son of Joseph only by a supposition which might be false, any other entry in the list may be in the same plight; and it is incredible that the compiler could prefix such a phrase to his list, so long as he put the slightest faith in it himself. Apart from those two words, there is no sign that the compiler looked on this long series of names with the least misgiving; and the conclusion follows that

¹ Luke iii. 23, *ὡς ἐνομίσθητο*.

the words are not his, and that in fact they are interpolated. We may not have the evidence of manuscripts to prove that the words have been thrust in; but it is impossible for us to set limits to the extent of insertions, changes, or omissions made during the ages for which we have no manuscript at all.

The removal of these two words brings out in stronger light the fact that for the genealogist the descent of Jesus from Abraham was strictly natural, and that any interference with its strictly natural character would deprive it of all value. The genealogy of Matthew makes use of the word expressive of ordinary generation, in every case from Abraham down to Joseph; and the words which follow state nothing to the contrary in the case of Mary.

But the writer of the first Gospel declares it to be historical fact, not only that Jesus Christ is the son of David, but that all the generations from Abraham to David amount to fourteen, the generations from David to the Babylonish captivity, and again from the captivity down to Jesus inclusive, being also in each case fourteen. Thus, three sets of fourteen generations are said to give all the links in the chain between Abraham and Jesus. The assertion is of the greatest importance, for, if we confine our attention to the genealogy itself, we find that the generations in the third stage, including Jesus, amount only to thirteen. Among the attempts to get over this difficulty may be reckoned the insertion of the name of Jehoiakim between Josiah and Jechoniah, the latter being the grandson, and not the son, as Matthew states, of Josiah. The only result of this, however, is to make the second set of generations fifteen; it does not supply the link necessary to complete the even number of the third set. It needs scarcely to be said that interpreters are at no loss to find explanations for this as for other difficulties; and a favourite method employed by them is to insist that objections urged now were known and urged long ago.

The objections to these genealogies were known long ago, indeed; and perhaps no circumstance shows more clearly the dishonesty and deception of some of the most illustrious of

Christian doctors. Far beyond the others in learning, Jerome is the one who does least violence to our sense of truthfulness. Of his suggestion, that Jechonias in Matt. i. 11 is Jehoiakim, while the Jechoniah of the following verse is Jehoiachin, we need only say that it seems to disparage the mental powers of the genealogist, who clearly describes them as one and the same person. Augustine, perfectly aware that a link is lacking in the second set of generations, and that the number of the third set is deficient, resorts to the favourite expedient of counting Jechoniah twice, on the ground that 'whenever a series turns out of the right line to go in any other direction there is an angle made, and that part which is in the angle is reckoned twice.'¹

This clearly is laid down as a general principle. But the Exodus, surely, is as great an angle as the carrying away to Babylon. Yet neither Salmon nor Naasson is reckoned twice. Do what we will, then, we cannot, confining ourselves to Matthew's genealogy, make up the number of forty-two generations; but at this point Augustine interposes with a curious quibble. If Matthew had stated explicitly that the three sets taken together amount to forty-two, he would, Augustine thinks, have been telling a lie; but Matthew, he argues, 'does not sum them all up and say that the total is forty-two, because one of their fathers, *i.e.* Jechoniah, is reckoned twice. . . . Matthew, therefore, whose purpose was to draw out Christ's kingly character, counts forty successions in the genealogy exclusive of Christ. This number denotes the time for which we must be governed by Christ in this world. . . . That this number should denote our temporal life, a reason offers at hand in this, that the seasons of the year are four, and that the world itself is bounded by four sides. But forty contains ten four times; moreover, ten itself is made up by a proceeding from one to four.' We are left in a bog of symbols and types, and merely note the remark of Remigius, that if we take the generations as being forty-two 'we shall say that the holy

¹ *De Cons. Evang.* ii. 4, quoted in the *Catena Aurea*, ascribed to Thomas Aquinas, in Matt. i. 17.

Church is signified, for this number is the product of seven and six. The six denotes labour, the seven rest.'

But without referring yet to the genealogy of the third Gospel, we have to compare that of Matthew with statements in the Old Testament writings, by which it may be tested down to the Babylonish captivity, for after that time it passes altogether beyond our control. The time from Abraham to David agrees with the genealogies of Genesis and the later books. But in chap. i. 8 we are confronted by the formidable statement that Joram begat Ozias—this Ozias being also known as Uzziah and Azariah. But the genealogist has here struck out three generations, for Joram¹ (son of Jehoshaphat, the friend and ally of Ahab of Israel) is in the Old Testament the father of Ahaziah,² who was slain by the order of Jehu, when the latter conspired against and slew the sons of Ahab. Ahaziah, again, was the father of Joash, who is said to have reigned well during all the days of Jehoiada³ the priest, and Joash was succeeded by his son Amaziah, in whom at last we have the father of Uzziah.⁴ These omissions, astounding in any writer with the least claim to the historical sense, are largely explained by the eagerness of a mystical mind to repeat in subsequent divisions the number of the generations in the first marked stage from Abraham to David. As these amounted to fourteen, the genealogist had no scruple in laying the rest on the bed of Procrustes, and lengthening or shortening them at his will. But this explanation is not less fatal to the historical authority of the writer than are the spiritual objects attributed to him by Augustine or Remigius.

Either Joram was the father of Uzziah, or he was not. Either all the generations between David and Jechoniah were fourteen, or they were not. The goodness or badness of the persons forming the links in the chain cannot possibly modify historical facts. Yet with a wonderful assurance Augustine can tell us that 'Ochazias, Joash, and Amasias were excluded from the number

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 50.

² 2 Kings viii. 25; ix. 27.

³ 2 Kings xii. 1, 21.

⁴ 2 Kings xiv. 21.

because their wickedness was continuous and without interval.' Solomon, to be sure, had fallen into wicked ways, 'but he was suffered to hold his kingdom for his father's deserts, Rehoboam for those of his son.' Augustine means probably that Rehoboam was reckoned for the deserts of his good grandson Asa, not of his wicked son Abijam. The discrepancy would be of no importance in the Augustinian view of history; but here, as in the case of the angles or turning-points already mentioned, Augustine makes it a matter of principle. Ahaziah, Joash, and Amāziah were struck out because they were successively evil. 'This, then, is an example how a race is cut off when wickedness is shown therein in perpetual succession.' There is some obstacle in the way of this theory in the statement that Amāziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord;¹ and even the Chronicler, with whom Amāziah is evidently no favourite, does not warrant the summary sentence of Augustine. But the constant wickedness of Amāziah was necessary for the bishop of Hippo; and what should hinder him from creating it?

In marked contrast with all this is the admission of Jerome that 'according to historical truth there were three intervening kings who are omitted by the evangelist, because it was his purpose to make each of the three periods consist of fourteen generations,' while the particular omission of the three immediate descendants of Joram is said to have been suggested by the fact that 'Joram had connected himself with Jezebel's most wicked race.'² The inference from Jerome's admission wholly destroys the credit of the genealogist as a historian. After such twistings of facts as these it seems almost needless to note that Matthew (i. 12) makes Zorobabel a son of Salathiel, while in 1 Chron. iii. 19 he is a nephew of Salathiel (being the son of his brother Pedaiah), or that the name of Abiud is not to be found among the sons of Zorobabel in the same passage of the Chronicles.

When we turn to the genealogy of the third Gospel, the difficulties are no less serious. In Matthew, Zorobabel is the son

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 3.

² Quoted by Aquinas, *C. Aur.* in Matt. i. 8.

of Salathiel; in the Chronicles, he is a son of Pedaiah; in Luke, he is the son of quite a new person named Neri. In Matthew the son of Zorobabel is Abiud, whose name is not to be found in the Old Testament books; but in Luke the son of Zorobabel is Rhesa, who is also unknown to the Chronicler, while in these two names (Salathiel and Zorobabel) alone between David and Joseph the husband of Mary do these two genealogies agree. From Abraham to David the succession is in both the same; but from David onwards, with the two exceptions just mentioned, these pedigrees, which agree in deriving the lineage of Jesus through Joseph, trace the descent through a totally different set of names. Joseph's father in Matthew is called Jacob, in Luke Heli. In the former Jesus is descended from David through Solomon, in the latter through Nathan. In Matthew the line comes through the known series of kings; in Luke, except in Zorobabel and Salathiel, through a succession of unknown persons.

This difficulty respecting the parentage of Joseph is commonly explained on the hypothesis of a Levirate marriage, and that the genealogy of Matthew gives the natural, that of Luke the legal, descent. But it is obvious that if the two fathers of Joseph were brothers, sons of the same father, they had one and the same lineage; and this would involve no difference of genealogy beyond Heli and Joseph. Hence there has arisen the further notion that they were half-brothers, sons of the same mother but of different fathers, and that another Levirate marriage had taken place in the case of the mother of the real and putative fathers of Joseph. This same complicated arrangement is brought in in order to account for the appearance of Salathiel and Zorobabel, Neri in Luke and Jechonias in Matthew standing to Salathiel in the relation of Jacob and Heli to Joseph. This is, of course, conceivably possible; but the fact in the case of Salathiel is disproved by the statements of the Chronicler, if indeed any dependence can be placed on the latter.

The attempt to get over the difficulty by regarding one of the genealogies as that of Mary is not more successful. Both the

evangelists prefer to give the genealogy of Joseph, while neither of them gives any support to the Davidic descent of Mary, for the phrase 'house of David' in Luke i. 27 refers to Joseph, and not to the more remote word 'espoused,' while the pointed expression that Joseph went with Mary to Bethlehem, 'because he was [not 'they were'] of the house and lineage of David' seems to exclude the idea.

The frequent occurrence of the same names in the genealogy of Luke can scarcely fail to give strength to the suspicion that the list is in great part fictitious. But here the compiler of the *Catena Aurea*, which bears the name of Thomas Aquinas, cites from Eusebius a piece of special pleading not unlike that by which Augustine, as we have seen, seeks to save the veracity of Matthew. 'If Luke,' he says, 'had asserted that Joseph was the son of Heli in like manner as Matthew, there might be some dispute; but seeing the case is that Matthew gives his opinion, Luke repeats the common opinion of many, not his own, for since there were among the Jews different opinions of the genealogy of the Christ, and yet all traced him up to David, because to him were the promises made, while many affirmed that the Christ would come through Solomon and the other kings, some shunned this opinion because of the many crimes recorded of their kings, and because Jeremiah said of Jechonias that a man should not rise of his seed to sit on the throne of David. This last view Luke takes, though conscious that Matthew gives the real truth of the genealogy. This is the first reason; the next is a deeper one, for Matthew, when he began to write of the things before the conception of Mary and the birth of Jesus in the flesh, very fitly, as in a history, commences with the ancestry in the flesh, and, descending from thence, declares his generation from those who went before. For when the Word became flesh he descended. But Luke hastens forward to the regeneration which takes place in baptism, and then gives another succession of families, and, rising up from the lowest to the highest, keeps out of sight the sinners of whom Matthew makes mention, and names those who

had lived a virtuous life in the sight of God. To him, therefore, who is born in God he ascribes parents who are according to God on account of this resemblance in character.'

Absurd, mischievous, and false as these sentences may be, they are both noteworthy and instructive. Men who think and speak thus are incapable of forming any right judgement on matters of fact. Their historical sense has been so systematically perverted that their conclusions on all subjects must be received with the utmost suspicion: and we should be justified in saying that such writers could not be relied upon for the truth in any statements made by them, whatever these may be. There is, however, no real reason for thinking that these genealogies belonged to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in their earlier shapes, while there is much to lead us to an opposite conclusion. The genealogy of Matthew is followed, while that of Luke is preceded, by a narrative which undoubtedly denies the descent of Jesus from David through Joseph by a natural order. Yet, if these genealogies are not taken as asserting the natural parentage of Jesus through Joseph, they are absolutely meaningless. When the Manichean Faustus protested against the absurdity of tracing the line through Joseph on the reservation that Joseph was not the father of Jesus, Augustine could only urge the necessity of so tracing it on account of the superior dignity of the masculine gender. But it is scarcely necessary to remark that any one who disbelieved the paternity of Joseph could have traced the pedigree through Mary, if he believed that Mary also was of the seed of David: and this, in truth, we find to be the case. Justin Martyr not only does not admit the genealogies of the Synoptic Gospels; he is either ignorant of them, or he disbelieves them. According to him, it is Mary, not Joseph, who is descended from David. If Justin had before him our first Gospel, he clearly cared nothing for the authority of the angel who addressed Joseph as the son of David. In our third Gospel, Joseph goes to Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David. According to Justin, he went thither merely because he belonged to the tribe of

Judah, which inhabited that region. Nor was the genealogy of the Gospel which Justin followed the only one which traced the descent of Jesus from David through his mother. It was so set down in the Protevangelion of James and the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary. It is quite possible that these and other such works may have been drawn from the same sources with the Gospel which Justin had before him; and it is quite certain that none of them corresponded with our Synoptic narratives.¹

There is something not a little humiliating in the fact that the mere appearance of authority should have secured the intellectual submission of Christendom for fifteen centuries or more. Genealogies are formal documents, which are either exact in the statement of facts, or wholly worthless. Here are two genealogies included in books still maintained by some, or many, to be without flaw or error. It follows that all their contradictions must be explained away, or their contradictory statements be accepted as truths. The result is that slavery of the intellect which has spread a blight over Christendom. For many or most of these lists it is quite possible that the idea of a natural descent from David may have followed the application of the title 'Son of David' in a spiritual sense, and that genealogies may have been framed in accordance with the idea so suggested.² However this may be, the manifest evidences of fabrication, with the tangled masses of contradictions which are the necessary result of fabrication, deprive both these canonical genealogies of all historical value and authority.

But when this has been said, the fact remains that the genealogies inserted in our canonical Synoptics, and those which Justin had before him, all agree in tracing the descent of Jesus from David, and that this descent is manifestly in the natural order. Whether it came through Joseph or through Mary is a point of little consequence; and the one question which we have still to ask is whether this idea of Davidic descent according to the flesh is described as receiving any countenance from Jesus

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, Part II. ch. iii.

² See Appendix A.

himself. The answer must, it seems, be a flat negative. The dilemma into which Jesus is said to bring the Pharisees by asking who the Christ is, and how, if David be his father, David could speak of him as his master or lord, implies a rejection of the idea, and the title 'Jesus of Nazareth' points in the same direction. It looks as though it came from those for whom his connexion with Bethlehem and the house of David was a thing unknown; and yet, if the Synoptic stories be true, the birth of Jesus had been notorious. It had been marked by the appearance of a star and the visit of mysterious strangers; by the slaughter of children throughout a whole district; by the presentation of the child in the temple as well as by all the marvellous circumstances attendant on the birth of his precursor John the Baptist. According to these traditions (however contradictory and mutually exclusive they may be) there was no man living about whose birth and early history there could be less doubt. Eastern kings had knelt before him as he lay in the manger. The shepherds of Bethlehem had crowded round him after they had heard the angels singing in the heavens. Aged saints had received him into their arms in the temple with thankful joy and with the explicit warning that the child was set for the rising and falling of many in Israel; and at the age of twelve the child himself had disputed with the greatest doctors of Jerusalem and left them astonished at his understanding and answers. Yet all these traditions of his Davidic descent are forgotten when he comes to enter on his ministry. In Galilee he is known simply as the carpenter's son, or as being himself the carpenter. In Nazareth the people wonder how he had obtained his wisdom. But no reference is made to the circumstances of his birth or to his descent, either by his hearers, or by his mother, who is said to have kept all these sayings and pondered them in her heart, or, as the narratives tell us, by himself. The fourth Gospel, which makes Jerusalem, and not Galilee, the chief scene of his labours, betrays the same forgetfulness. In this Gospel (vii. 15) the Jews assert positively his want of education, and they do this in the very temple where he had astonished

the doctors some twenty years before; and their assertion that they knew whence he came is not only not denied but is said to be admitted by Jesus himself. Yet this assertion was accompanied by the declaration that when the Anointed One comes no one knows whence he is, although, again, some thirty years before, the chief priests and scribes, on the inquiry of Herod, were ready with the answer that he must be of the lineage of David, and must be born in Bethlehem.

There is, therefore, for these genealogies, and for the ideas on which they are based, no corroborative testimony or evidence whatsoever.

CHAPTER II

THE NARRATIVES OF THE NATIVITY

IF a reader, taking up the first Gospel without any knowledge of the third or of any later Christian literature bearing on the subject, should confine himself strictly to the statements of Matthew, he would certainly conclude that Joseph, the betrothed husband of Mary, discovering that his future wife was with child, not by himself, thought of privately putting her away; that the only intimation of the true cause of her pregnancy was received by him in a dream, in which the angel of the Lord is said to have announced to him that the child had been conceived by the Holy Ghost (or breath), and that he should be called Jesus, the Healer, in order to fulfil a prophecy of Isaiah, that the Messiah should be born of a virgin (Matt. i. 22, 23); that on the strength of this dream, and of this alone, he took to him Mary his wife without availing himself of his rights as a husband until after the birth of her first-born; that after his birth some wise men, Magi, from the East, who had seen his star, came to Jerusalem to see if they could find him; that Herod the king, hearing of their errand, was troubled, and all the people were thrown into alarm; that the chief priests, when questioned as to the birthplace of the Messiah, answered at once that it must be Bethlehem, in accordance with a prophecy of Micah (Matt. ii. 6); that Herod, having made a careful note of the time at which the Magi had seen the star, sent them to look for the child, bidding them, when they had found him, to return to him that he might go and do him reverence; that as soon as they

set out from Jerusalem, the star which they had seen before re-appeared, and, guiding them forward, stood at last over the very spot where the child was; that, after spreading out before him in the presence of his mother their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, while Joseph and Mary were in like manner warned to take the child away secretly into Egypt, and that accordingly, in order to fulfil a prophecy of Hosea (Matt. ii. 15), Joseph took the child and his mother straight from Bethlehem into Egypt, leaving Herod, when he found that he had been cheated by the Magi, to order a general massacre of the children¹ in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood in order to fulfil another prophecy of Jeremiah; that on the death of Herod, Joseph, again taught by an angel in a dream, returned with the child from Egypt, but, being afraid to go to Jerusalem, made his way by a side route to Galilee to fulfil some other prophecies.

On further scrutiny the reader of this chapter would see that down to the time of the preaching of John the Baptist, the first Gospel speaks of Jesus as being present only in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth. To Jerusalem he never goes at all, while his

¹ This narrative is one of several features in the Nativity stories, which the Hindu tales of Krishna are supposed to have taken directly from the Christian traditions. With this question of borrowing I am not called upon to deal. Even if it could be shown that every incident in the Krishna myth was taken from Christian Gospels, this would not add one iota to the historical authority of any of those Gospels. Whether the Purana stories of Krishna belong to a comparatively late epoch in our era is, again, a matter of complete indifference. The Purana legends may, or may not, be constructed from materials belonging even to prehistoric ages; and, if we wish to obtain an answer to this question, we must take the whole legend to pieces, and trace all its factors back to their earliest ascertainable forms. This task has been most conscientiously accomplished by Mr. John M. Robinson in his volume intitled *Christ and Krishna*, and to that volume I must refer the reader for the evidence which proves that every single feature in the Krishna story was commonly known in ages long preceding the Christian era; that if there has been borrowing, the borrowing has been rather on the Christian side than on that of the Hindu; that the legends with which the name of Krishna is more especially connected had a high religious standing in the days of Megasthenes, and that an important Krishna cultus, resting on these legends, existed even before that period and flourished long before any possible advent of Christian influences. From this point of view the controversy must be regarded as finally closed.

reputed father Joseph learns nothing of the circumstances of the conception from his mother, who is wholly silent throughout the narrative. The reader might further mark that the first tidings of the birth of Jesus are brought to Jerusalem by the Magi; that a star, visible to the Magi on their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, must also have been visible to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and have impressed still more deeply on their minds the fact of the birth of the Anointed One; and that the slaughter of the innocents would still further mark by a painful memory, not soon effaced from the hearts of mothers, the circumstances attendant on the visit of the mysterious Magi.

But, before scrutinising the alleged astronomical phenomena, he might remark that the whole tenor of the narrative is a complete justification of the science of astrology; that the first intimation of the birth of the Healer was given to worshippers, it would seem, of Ahuromazda (Ormuzd), who have somehow or other the power of distinguishing his peculiar star; that from these strangers the first tidings of his birth are received by the Jews at Jerusalem, and therefore that the theory must be right which connects great events in the life of men with phenomena in the starry heavens. If this Divine sanction of astrology be contested on the ground that this was an exceptional event, in which, simply to bring the Magi to Jerusalem, God caused the star to appear in accordance with their superstitious science, the difficulty is only pushed one degree backwards, for in this case God, it is asserted, brought about an event which was perfectly certain to strengthen the belief of the Magi, of Herod, of the Jewish priests, and of the Jews generally in the truth of astrology. If, to avoid this alternative, recourse be had to the notion that the star appeared by chance, and that this chance or accident directed the Magi aright, is the position really improved? Is chance consistent with any notion of Divine government at all?

A similar difficulty recurs in the application of the alleged prophecy that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem. The passage in the book of Micah says nothing about his birth in

Bethlehem. It merely asserts that some expected governor should come out of (not be born in) Bethlehem, and be a descendant of David. It follows, therefore, that, as astrological science or chance directed the Magi rightly to Jerusalem, so a wrong interpretation of alleged prophecy guided the chief priests aright to the birthplace of the deliverer.¹

But the difficulties are as yet only begun. Herod's first anxious question to the Magi is to ascertain the time of the appearance of the star. He 'inquires exactly' (Matt. ii. 7); and he must have had a motive for so doing. What was this motive? Could he have had any other purpose than that of determining the age under which no infant in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem should be allowed to live? But, according to the narrative, Herod never conceived the idea of slaughtering the children till he found that he had been 'mocked' of the wise men; and the fictitious nature of the story is betrayed by this anticipation of motives which at the time spoken of could have no existence. Yet further, Herod, who, though in a high degree cruel, unjust, and unscrupulous, is represented as a man of no slight sagacity, clearness of purpose, and strength of will, and who feels a deadly jealousy of an infant who, he is sure, has been born in Bethlehem (a place only a few miles distant from Jerusalem), is here described not as sending his own emissaries privately to put him to death, or despatching

¹ The expectations (whatever they may have been) of a deliverer looked for by the Jews cannot be taken as accrediting an alleged prediction, unless we can show that the prediction was both clear and definite. General expectations of a like kind have been entertained among all depressed and conquered peoples. To this expectation among the Jews at the time of the birth of Jesus, Tacitus, in the opinion of Dean Milman, bears witness. But in the passage which Dr. Milman quotes from his *Histories*, v. 13, Tacitus is speaking of the time, not of the birth of Jesus, but of the destruction of Jerusalem, and states that at that precise time the Jews looked for the rising of a great deliverer, and interprete the prophecy of Vespasian and Titus. Of the prophecy of Micah Dean Milman says simply that 'no prediction in the Old Testament appears more distinct than that which assigns for the nativity of the great prince who was to perpetuate the line of David the same town which had given birth to his royal ancestor.' But the passage of Micah says nothing about any nativity. And did Jesus perpetuate the line of David? If the phrase be taken in a spiritual sense, surely Bethlehem may be spiritualised also.

them with the Magi, or detaining the latter at Jerusalem until he had ascertained the truth of their tale and the correctness of the answer of the priests and scribes, but as simply suffering the Magi to go by themselves, at the same time charging them to return with the information for which he is said to have shown himself so feverishly anxious.¹

This strange conduct can be accounted for only on the ground of judicial blindness; but they who resort to such an explanation must suppose that this blindness was inflicted in order to save the new-born child thus threatened; and if they adopt this hypothesis, they must further believe that this arrangement likewise insured the death of a number of infants instead of one. A natural reluctance to take up such a notion might prompt the question, Why were the Magi brought to Jerusalem at all? If they knew that the star was the star of Jesus (Matt. ii. 4), and were by this knowledge conducted to Jerusalem, why did it not suffice to guide them straight to Bethlehem, and thus prevent the murder of the innocents? Why did the star desert them after its first appearance, not to be seen again till they issued from Jerusalem? And if it did not desert them, why did they ask Herod and the priests which road they should take, when, by the hypothesis, the star was ready to guide them? As far as the evangelist is concerned, these last incidents were so arranged only to enable him to bring in the alleged prophecy of Micah, which we have already seen to be thoroughly inapplicable.

On the nature of the star it is idle to waste many words.² In

¹ Dean Milman alleges certain atrocities committed by Herod on the discovery of the plot of Bagoas as a fitting prelude for the slaughter of the innocents; but he says nothing of the silence of Josephus on this event and on the visit of the Magi and the incidents which preceded it.

² Dean Milman, *History of Christianity*, i. iii., deprecates the rigidity of interpretation which identifies this phenomenon with a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, and asks for the same latitude of exposition in the New Testament writings which is allowed for those of the Old. But what is the latitude which is, or which ought to be, allowed for the Old Testament? What, again, if this latitude be granted, did Dr. Milman take this phenomenon to be? It was either something or nothing. It is useless to talk of persons being awe-struck under such extraordinary events, when he has himself asserted that they lived in an

a narrative involved in such a web of contradictions it is a mere throwing away of time to inquire whether at or about this time there was, or was not, some conjunction or transit of stars or some appearance of a comet. We may give due weight to the assertion of Kepler, that a remarkable transit took place much about this time; and yet we may affirm that neither that transit nor any comet could be this phenomenon. We know well that the conjunction of stars is by comparison only a momentary phenomenon, and that comets, like other bodies in the heavens, will not appear to point to, or to stand over, any particular spot, as we move from place to place, but will appear to go forward with our movement, and that the phenomenon here recorded, if it is to be explained

age in which events in our judgement the most astounding 'might pass off as little more than ordinary occurrences.' Dean Milman's judgement is free when, dealing with Jewish credulity generally, he tells us that the marvels ascribed to the ministry of Jesus took place in an age and among a people which superstition had made so familiar with what were supposed to be preternatural events that 'wonders awakened no emotion, or were speedily superseded by some new demand on the ever ready belief.' But his judgement is not free, when he thinks that it is his duty to find explanations which may satisfy the exigencies of the traditional theology of Christendom.

In the course of this inquiry I shall have to cite from the writings of Dr. Milman many passages which will exhibit him in his strength and in his weakness. But at the outset I must in the plainest words say that, when I find myself least in agreement with him, I regard his memory and his work with undiminished reverence and gratitude. He felt honestly convinced that in the canonical Gospels there *must* be a true record of events which actually took place; and if he found them self-contradictory or mutually exclusive, what could he do but choose one of the versions and say nothing about the inconsistencies between that version and the others? The method is beyond doubt not legitimate; but to suppose that Dr. Milman could leap from the prevalent worship of sacred books to thorough freedom from bibliolatry in any shape would be to ascribe to him a superhuman strength. He did a work of vast importance, which will continue to produce more and more fruit as the years pass by. Nor have I the least doubt that if the weak points of his method could have been brought before him thirty years ago as they might be brought now, he would have given up many conclusions which might be shown to be indefensible.

I purposely in many instances quote from Dean Milman in preference to more recent writers, not merely because I have specially scrutinised his words through a long series of years, but because he is, on the whole, the fairest, the most straightforward, the most truthful, of the writers who in this present century have dealt with subjects which seem to carry with them peculiar temptations to disingenuous shiftiness, even if they do not lead to downright misrepresentation and falsehood.

at all by human experience, could only have been a body far within the reach of the earth's attraction; and in this case its light would have been extinguished in a much shorter time than that which must be spent in a night journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Nothing, it is true, is said of the hour at which they left Jerusalem; but we may give them the benefit of the doubt, and suppose that they journeyed by night, for, if they travelled by day, the star would necessarily be invisible.

We have already seen that the passage adduced from Micah to prove the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem has been misapplied. The same remark must be made on the prophecy cited from Jeremiah in reference to the slaughter of the innocents, and, indeed, on all passages cited from the prophetic books, whether in this Gospel or in any other book of the New Testament writings. The sentence taken from Jeremiah (xxxi. 15) refers not to children slaughtered at Bethlehem hundreds of years after his death, but to persons taken captive at Rama, in the tribe of Benjamin, near the tomb of Rachel, who is thus represented as weeping for her children; but these, the prophet adds, shall return and her sorrow shall be turned into joy. At Bethlehem Leah should weep, not Rachel, for Leah was the mother of Judah and his descendants.

The passage cited (Matt. i. 23) from Isaiah to prove the birth of Jesus from a virgin by extraordinary generation is, if possible, still more violently forced. The chapter in Isaiah explains itself. The confederate armies of Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, had marched against Jerusalem, to the consternation of king Ahaz, who is warned by Isaiah to keep quiet, and not to heed the two tails of those smoking firebrands Rezin and Pekah. Isaiah further bids him ask for a sign, and when Ahaz refuses to do so, tells him that a woman shall conceive and bear a son, whose name should be called Immanuel, and who should eat butter and honey, and that before the child should know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, the land abhorred by Ahaz should be forsaken of both her kings. The words of Isaiah thus referred to events which were to take place during the lifetime of Ahaz,

nor do they intimate that the conception of this child was to be in any way extraordinary, or that the young woman was to be a virgin in the modern medical sense of the word. This child, again, was to be called Immanuel; but Mary was bidden to call her child Jesus, and the meaning of the two words is not the same. Yet more, in what sense were butter and honey especially the food of Jesus? and how could an event which was not to take place for some centuries be by any possibility a sign to Ahaz? Referring the words, however, to events in his own day, we see that Isaiah is represented as saying that before this child should have ceased to be an infant, the land which Ahaz abhorred (*i.e.* Syria and Israel) should be forsaken of both her kings (*i.e.* Rezin should be slain and Pekah taken captive). Whether Isaiah foretold even these events is another question. In one casual phrase the narrative seems to betray the fact that he did not. The *refusal* of Ahaz to ask for a sign or to tempt the Lord is followed by words of blame on the very ground that he had been thus not only wearying men but tempting God also; and the incongruity of this expostulation seems to be the result of a modification of the original narrative. At the least, we have here no evidence that Isaiah had any foreknowledge of events beyond that which may be the fruit of long experience added to great natural powers of discernment.

The misapplication, in Matt. ii. 15, of the passage of Hosea to the return of Joseph and Mary from Egypt is even more extravagant. The prophetic writings are full of denunciations against any dealings with that country or its inhabitants; and Hosea (xi. 1), far from speaking of things to come, refers only to the past history of the Israelites in the words, 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.' But this call was answered only by rebellion. 'I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with the bands of love, and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on the jaws.' One clause alone will serve the purpose of the evangelist; and that one clause, in

defiance of the plainest context, he takes out from a series of sentences which he would have shuddered to apply to the Messiah.

In these instances he has forced passages to suit his purpose; in the last verse of the second chapter he invents a prophecy. There is no prediction in any part of the Old Testament writings that any one shall be called a Nazarene. They who choose so to do may adopt the explanation of Jerome, that if Matthew had meant to quote a particular text, he would have written not *prophets* but *the prophet*, and that by thus using the plural he evidently means to take the general sense of all Scripture, which testifies that the Master shall be (*nazar*) holy.

But the motives which in this Gospel animate the living are not less mysterious than the interpretations assigned to the words of the prophets in former ages. A dream, or rather, it is said, an angel in a dream, bids Joseph return with the child and his mother into the land of Israel. Herod is dead; but Archelaos, his son, still reigns in Judæa. Fearing his wrath, Joseph shrinks from going to Jerusalem, and, warned again in a dream,¹ 'turns aside

¹ In an appendix 'On the Influence of the more Imaginative Incidents of the early Evangelic History on the Propagation and Maintenance of the Religion,' Dr. Milman traces the rapid progress and wide acceptance of the popular Christianity to the thaumaturgy which runs through the Gospel narratives. The passages which relate these marvellous interpositions and prodigies, and which, he admits, 'cannot accord with the more subtle and fastidious intelligence of the present time,' are precisely those, he argues, which were 'dearest to the believers of an imaginative age.' By this 'supernatural agency' 'the doctrines of Christianity were implanted in the mind,' and 'the reverential feeling, thus excited, most powerfully contributed to maintain the efficacy of the religion for at least seventeen centuries.' Unfortunately, in a previous passage, he had spoken of a belief in these supernatural events as the foundation of the religion, as something which the religion could not have invented, and as being indispensable to its existence; and it is precisely this proposition which he contradicts when he speaks of these prodigies as being simply a kind of language for conveying opinions and infusing sentiments,—in other words, as a mere dressing, or embellishments to which there are no corresponding historical facts. We have already seen (pp. 135, 175) that Dr. Milman lays stress on the unbounded credulity of the whole Jewish people in those ages; and indeed he sets the matter at rest in the following decisive passage: 'That some of the Christian legends were deliberate forgeries can scarcely be questioned. The principle of pious fraud appeared to justify the mode of working on the popular mind. It was admitted and avowed. To deceive into Christianity was so valuable a service as to hallow deceit itself.' See, further, p. 149.

into the parts of Galilee,' as though the change of plan involved little more of toil and difficulty, and takes up his abode in a city called Nazareth, which, the evangelist clearly means, he now entered for the first time. Yet to go from Egypt to Galilee it is absolutely necessary to pass through the whole of Judæa, or else to go through the deserts on the east and north of the Dead Sea, as well as the country of Moab, and then to cross the Jordan into Samaria, or the lake of Gennesareth into Galilee, before Nazareth could be reached. And when Joseph had done all this, he would still be in the lion's mouth, if a dread of the family of Herod was the motive for his journey. If Archelaos was to be feared in Jerusalem, his brother Antipas would be scarcely less formidable in Galilee.

Such are some (but by no means all) of the difficulties involved in the narrative of the first Gospel, considered strictly by itself. These difficulties are certainly not lessened when we compare the stories in Matthew with others in the Old Testament writings and elsewhere. The idea of birth from a maiden without the intervention of an earthly father was by no means new. Dr. Milman¹ cites the instances of Bouddha and Fohi; and with these may be taken the stories of Asklepios (Æsculapius), Epaphos, Perseus, Pythagoras, and Plato. These virgin-born children are generally in danger from the fears of tyrants. These lie in wait, or frame schemes to destroy Cyrus and Romulus, Herakles and Telephos, Œdipus, Chandragupta,² and Moses. The children are all delivered, and all grow up to be powerful, wise, and good; but their deliverance may involve the death of many in their stead. The decree of Pharaoh seals the doom of all the new-born male children of the Hebrews; but Moses escapes, like Jesus from the massacre at Bethlehem. Later Jewish legends transferred the same idea to the history of Abraham, and spoke of Nimrod as warned by a star that Terah would have a son who should become the father of a mighty people. Moses, too, is taken away to a distant land; and the

¹ *History of Christianity*, i. 99.

² Max Müller, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 290.

narrative of the presentation of Jesus in the temple has a parallel in the story of Bouddha, who is also blessed by an aged saint, who takes him in his arms,—this child being one who afterwards said, ‘Let all the sins that were committed in the world fall on me, that the world may be delivered.’¹ Is anything gained by attempts to prove that such legends as these have been directly suggested by statements in our canonical Gospels?

But when from our first Gospel we turn to the narrative of the nativity in the third Gospel, we find ourselves confronted by quite another story. Without noticing, for the present, the events which are stated to have preceded and accompanied the birth of the Baptist, we have an account of the nativity of Jesus which is wholly different from that of the first Gospel. Any one who confined himself strictly to this account would learn that the angel Gabriel appeared in Nazareth to the Virgin Mary, who was espoused to Joseph, and told her that she should become the mother of a child, conceived not by ordinary generation, but by the Holy Ghost (spirit, breath, of God),² that his name should be called Jesus, and that he should receive the throne of his father David; that Mary, having heard these things, went in haste to the city where Zacharias and Elisabeth were living; that the babe in Elisabeth’s womb leaped at the approach of Mary, who broke out into a song of thanksgiving for the providence which fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich empty away; that Mary, after remaining there three months, returned to Nazareth; and that the birth of John the Baptist, following in due time, caused great excitement, and the circumstances attending it ‘were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa.’ He would further learn that these things took place

¹ Kumârila, quoted by Max Müller, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 80.

² LUKE i.

ÆSCHYLUS, *Supp.*

35. πνεῦμα ἁγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σε'

576. θέλεις ἐπιπνολαῖς.

31. συλλήψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ, καὶ τέξῃ υἱόν.

λαβοῦσα δ' ἔρμα Διὸν ἀψευδεὶ λόγῳ

35. τὸ γεννώμενον ἁγιον . . .

γείνατο παῖδ' ἀμεμφῇ,

33. βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ πάντολβον.

at the time of the taxing carried out by Quirinus (Cyrenius), governor of Syria (Luke ii. 2); that for the purposes of enrolment Joseph with Mary goes from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born in a stable; that his birth was announced by angels, singing in the sky, to shepherds who watched their flocks by night; that the shepherds found the child as they had been directed, and in great astonishment spread everywhere (Luke ii. 17) the tidings of all that they had seen or heard; that on the eighth day the child was circumcised; and that after the days of purification (*i.e.* after forty days) Joseph and Mary presented him in the temple at Jerusalem, where Simeon proclaimed that the child was set for the rising and falling of many in Israel, and where Anna both blessed him and spoke of him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and, lastly, that after a peaceable performance of all things ordered in the law of the Lord they returned from Jerusalem to their own city, Nazareth.

According to this narrative, then, the child Jesus spends the first forty days of his life in Bethlehem, and after a few days spent in Jerusalem, is then carried to his permanent home in Nazareth. The appearance of Gabriel to Mary and the visit of Mary to Elisabeth may possibly be taken as events anterior to, and supplementary of, the narrative of Matthew; but, as in the first Gospel Joseph receives the intimation of Mary's pregnancy and the cause of it, not from Mary herself, but in a dream, so here we are not told that Mary imparted her knowledge to Joseph, who is seemingly left to discover the fact as best he may. In Luke, however, there is no trace of Joseph's intention to put his espoused wife away privily. In all other respects the two narratives altogether oppose and exclude each other. Not a word is there, in the third Gospel, of the star or of the wise men; not a word of the alarm and jealousy of Herod, or of the questions put to the chief priests and scribes; not a word of the presentation of gifts, of the sudden journey into Egypt, of the slaughter of the innocents, or of the secret and circuitous return to Galilee after the death of Herod (*i.e.* it would seem, in the following year).

Instead of all this, according to the third Gospel, the child, after a few days spent at Jerusalem, is, it must be repeated, within a few weeks after his birth, safely lodged in Nazareth. In the first Gospel Jesus never appears in Jerusalem till the last portion of his ministry (Matt. xxi. 1). In Luke he is described as being taken quietly and openly into the temple at a time when the first Synoptic represents him as being hidden away in Egypt, the facts of the circumcision and the purification not being mentioned by Matthew at all. In Luke there is not a hint of any fears of Herod, who seems never to trouble himself about the child, or even to have any knowledge of him. There is no tragedy or misery at Bethlehem, and certainly no mourning for children slain. Far from flying away hurriedly by night, his parents celebrate openly, and at the usual time, the circumcision of the child; and when he is presented in the temple, there is not only no sign that enemies are seeking his life, but the devout saints give public thanks for the manifestation of the great Healer. The events are talked about everywhere. They are noised abroad in a way likely to excite the greatest present wonder, and leave the deepest permanent remembrance. Expressions of astonishment run through the narrative. The shepherds at Bethlehem, the kinsfolk of Zacharias, the people, at Jerusalem, Mary herself, are full of wonder; and Mary ponders all these things in her heart. Yet each event, as it comes, is followed by the same blank astonishment, without, seemingly, imparting any real knowledge or carrying them a step forwards. Although she had had from the angel or messenger the announcement of an astounding event, which, according to the story, had come to pass, Mary again wonders when the shepherds crowd around the manger; and when the child at twelve years of age is found in the temple, she asks him reproachfully why he had so dealt with them as to make them seek him sorrowing. After the experience of some thirteen years, Mary has still to be taught by her Son that he must be about his Father's business.

In the one story, then, we have a birth (implying the con-

tinuous residence of the parents) at Bethlehem, a hurried flight (almost immediately after his birth) from the village into Egypt, and a journey, after many months, from Egypt to Nazareth in Galilee. In the other, the parents, who have lived at Nazareth, come to Bethlehem only for business of the State; and the casual birth in the stable is followed by a quiet sojourn, during which the child is circumcised, and by a leisurely journey to Jerusalem, whence, everything having gone off peaceably and happily, they return naturally to their own former place of abode, full, it is said again and again, of wonder at the things which had happened, and deeply impressed with the conviction that their child had a special work to do, and was specially gifted for it.

A closer analysis reveals still more curious contradictions. In the first Synoptic no communication is made to Mary, who (according to the letter of the narrative) finds herself with child, not knowing how or to what purpose. On the supposition that the two narratives are different versions of the same story (a position which we have seen to be ludicrously untenable), Mary must either have told Joseph of the apparition of Gabriel to herself in her waking hours (instead of leaving him to learn the coming event for the first time in a dream), or in some unaccountable way she must have forgotten the occurrence herself. This absurd hypothesis seems to have prompted the writer of the Protevangelion of James the Less to maintain that Mary, when asked by Joseph how she came to be with child, answered, 'As the Lord thy God liveth, I know not by what means.' But in truth the idea underlying the tale is in each case radically different. In Matthew, the angel who appears to the sleeping Joseph (the action in the first Gospel being mainly induced by apparitions during sleep) announces to him an event of which till then he had evidently known nothing; he even tells him the name of the child who is to be born, when, according to the third Gospel, it had been imparted by Gabriel to Mary nine months before his birth. But the announcement of Gabriel is clearly designed to prevent all offence by explaining exactly, before the fact, the manner in

which it was to be brought about. In the first Gospel there is no sign of such purpose or of its accomplishment. The evidence of the conception troubles Joseph. Yet he hears nothing from Mary,¹ nor is he set right by the angel, until he has resolved to put his betrothed wife away privily. The expression that 'she was *found*'² with child, is conclusive proof that, in the opinion of the evangelist, the discovery was made without any announcement on Mary's part, and, indeed, in spite of her silence. This silence is itself inexplicable on other grounds. Is it possible to suppose that a really pure-minded woman, when told by a visible messenger from heaven that she was to become a mother in a way wholly beyond or out of the course of nature, would not have hastened at once with the tidings to her future husband, but would have suffered him by her silence to indulge for months in suspicions intolerable from their injustice? Is it worth while to notice the vain attempts to reconcile these flagrant inconsistencies and impossibilities by notions such as that Joseph was at a distance, when both the Gospels represent him and Mary as being both at the same place, or that Mary, in deep perplexity, reserved her intelligence till she should have taken counsel with Elisabeth, when the motive assigned for her visit in the third Gospel is not anxiety or perplexity or doubt as to her duty, but simply to assure herself of the sign given to her by the angel (viz., the pregnancy of Elisabeth), an assurance given almost before she crosses the threshold, and followed by an immediate outburst of exultant thanksgiving? Is it worth while to waste words on the supposition that Mary did tell Joseph, but that he refused to believe

¹ Of this momentous difficulty Dr. Milman takes no notice. Indeed, it may fairly be said that he wove together a semi-plausible narrative by taking the statements of each Gospel separately, without comparing them with the statements relating to the same time in the other Gospels. His plan thus enabled him to leave out of sight the notes of time and place which in each narrative are of the essence of the story. Of Joseph's intention to put his wife away, Dean Milman merely says that on discovering the conception of his betrothed, he wished by a private dismissal to save her from rigorous punishment,—forgetting that this implies the fact of Mary's total silence on the subject of the annunciation. This is a strange way of treating a very grave matter.

² εὑρέθη, Matt. i. 18.

her? Are we to suppose that a man, thus incredulous about the message of an angel who had spoken with Mary while she was awake, should have his scruples instantly removed by phantasms in a dream? And, in such case, could the angel who appears to Joseph in the first Synoptic have failed to reprove him for this misplaced incredulity?¹

The analysis may be extended indefinitely. No announcement from Mary informs Elisabeth of the mercies vouchsafed to her. No astonishment or excitement on the part of Elisabeth causes a movement of the child in her womb. At the approach of Mary, and before a word is uttered, the child, of its own accord, leaps in the womb for joy (*i.e.* in perfect consciousness of the reason of its moving), and the movement of the child is followed, not preceded, by the excitement of the mother.² This beginning is followed, not by the dialogue of ordinary conversation, but by a hymn expressive of Mary's thankfulness, made up of phrases from books of the Old Testament, and more especially from the song put into the mouth of Hannah after the birth of Samuel. Not only the circumstances, however, of this visit, but the visit itself, are excluded by the narrative in the first Gospel, as well as deprived of all credit by the self-contradictions of the third; and hence no evidence is furnished by the third Gospel for the alleged facts that John the Baptist was only six months older than Jesus, or that there was any kindred between the two mothers, or any intimacy between the two families.

In truth, the narrative of the events preceding the birth of the Baptist is not less full of difficulties than those which have been already examined. An angel appears (Luke i. 11) and informs Zacharias that the notion of a celestial hierarchy, with marked gradations, obtained by the Jews from contact with the Zend religion, is true in fact, the inference being that an important truth

¹ For Justin's version of the annunciation, see *Supernatural Religion*, i. 303.

² Dr. Milman says that on this visit the joy occasioned by Mary's announcement of the miraculous conception seemed to communicate itself to the child of which Elisabeth was pregnant. The statement of the third Gospel, which is unmistakably clear, is precisely the reverse of this.

was discovered by heathen Persians, and by them imparted to the 'chosen seed.' This angel, after announcing the Baptist's birth, smites Zacharias with dumbness, because he asked for a sign to assure his faith. This severity is singularly unlike the treatment of Abraham, Hannah, and others, under similar circumstances, in the earlier traditions of the Old Testament, as well as of Joseph according to the first Gospel. Zacharias comes out of the sanctuary speechless; but although, according to the narrative (Luke i. 60), he was able to inform Elisabeth of the future birth of their child, as well as of his name, it does not appear that he made these facts known to the bewildered people. He stands beckoning, but neither he nor any one else thinks of the simple expedient of writing-tablets, which in due time only is resorted to. The story, moreover, does not say that Zacharias was condemned to a state of congenital dumbness, which is always accompanied by, and indeed is the result of, deafness. Though he could not speak, he was as well able to hear as ever. Why, then, when the time for naming the child has come, are Elisabeth and her kinsfolk under the necessity of making signs to him to learn his will about the naming of the child? In short, if we take the story as it stands, we are to suppose that Zacharias and Elisabeth, both, knowing the name of the future child, and having received no injunction to secrecy, impart their knowledge to no one else, and that hence their kinsfolk, when the day is come for the naming, call him Zacharias, and then for the first time learn to their astonishment that he is to be called John. For the first time also now the writing-tablets are mentioned, but in a way which seems to imply that they had not been used before. He does an act seemingly different from any which he had hitherto done, and his faith (if faith it can be called) is rewarded by the restoration of his speech. These things also are noised abroad throughout the whole region (Luke i. 65), like the incidents which accompany the birth of Jesus, and are apparently as soon forgotten.

Thus, then, we have two narratives, both of which agree in placing the nativity of Jesus at Bethlehem in Judæa, while the

first Gospel describes that place as the ordinary abode of his parents. In that Gospel marvellous signs accompany his birth, the chief being the star of the Magi and the terrible slaughter of the children. In the third Gospel the signs are of a different kind; but they are still more extensively known. Shepherds see and hear angels singing in the heavens, and having by their direction found the child, noise abroad what they had seen and heard. The babe is brought to the temple of Jerusalem, and is there seen openly, and spoken of as the Messiah to all who looked for redemption. Never was a fact which should have been more deeply impressed on the mind of the people than the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem.¹ Yet the fact is never asserted either by Jesus himself or by others, although the statement was most of all necessary to remove misconception, to disarm opposition, and to win acceptance. In truth (if we take the Gospel narratives as they stand), all knowledge of the fact seems utterly lost, although a vivid conviction remained still that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem, the inference being that as he was not born there

¹ Dr. Milman, who seems to have shrunk unconsciously from any real comparison of the narratives of the Synoptics, adduces in one place the political convulsion of the time as a reason for the slender hold which these astounding facts had on the popular remembrance.—*History of Christianity*, i. 87. But the more wonderful thing is that they seem to have passed away as completely from the memory of Mary herself. Nor is there the least sign in the narratives that the actors and spectators of these events were affected by the political agitation of the time. Dr. Milman also speaks of a common incredulity, which is also not known to the evangelists, for in their narratives all who see the events believe in the child's mission. But in another passage Dr. Milman asserts that, in spite of all these commotions, the circumstances of the Baptist's birth 'might be expected to excite the public attention in no ordinary degree.' But they did not; and Dr. Milman is content to pass over the difficulty without one word of comment. In truth, it seems impossible to gather from his pages whether any given event did or did not excite attention. We have already seen how he deals with the general credulity and superstition of the Jews (note ¹, p. 178). It is somewhat bewildering, after we have read such passages, to be told that the most cogent reason for accepting the truth of the whole narrative is that they 'relate in the same calm and equable tone the most extraordinary and trivial events.' Really, this fact furnishes a fatal argument against their general credibility. The view, such as it is, would tell equally well in favour of the Homeric poems, the English Chronicle, or of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Herodotos, and a host of others who relate in the same calm and equable tone the most astonishing and the most trivial events.

Jesus of Nazareth could not be that Messiah or Christ. This conviction is betrayed by Nathanael's inquiry (John i. 46) whether anything good can come out of Nazareth, and by the plain assertion with which the rulers are said to reject the claim of Jesus, that out of Galilee there arises no prophet.¹ In all the Gospels he is Jesus of Nazareth, which the third Gospel assumes as the usual abode of Joseph and Mary. He is saluted as such by the unclean spirits (Mark i. 24). He is sent as such by Pilate to Herod, as belonging to his Galilæan jurisdiction. As such, his aid is implored by the blind man at Jericho (Mark x. 46). As such, he is spoken of by the servants of the high priest at the denial by Peter. Jesus of Bethlehem he is never called, although the simple assertion of a fact so notorious at the time was alone needed, from the evangelists' point of view, to heal bitter divisions and soften a groundless antagonism. Even to Nathanael, with his deep faith, the fact, according to the fourth Gospel, is not imparted any more than to the unbelieving Jews. He is not told that he is mistaken in thinking that Jesus was really of Nazareth; but he is asked to come and see, the issue being his conviction that a good thing might come out of that city. We are, perhaps, scarcely justified in citing any utterances from the fourth Gospel. But if these are put aside, the fact remains that such indications as we possess point, so far as they go, to Nazareth as his birthplace. We have no ground whatever for thinking that he was born at Bethlehem.

Nor have we any more knowledge of the time of his birth. In the first Gospel it is, of course, placed during the reign of Herod the Great, for otherwise Herod could not be the slayer of the children in order to destroy Jesus. In the third Gospel, also, Zacharias receives the announcement of the Baptist's birth from

¹ John vii. 52. Had they, or had the evangelists, forgotten that Jonah and Nahum were both of Galilee?

The references here made to the fourth Gospel must not be regarded as conceding the historical authority of any statements found in it. But that Gospel may, nevertheless, reflect some of the opinions and thoughts of the time in that Jewish world of which the actual scribe knew so little. See p. 117.

Gabriel 'in the days of Herod the king,' and the birth of Jesus follows that of the Baptist after an interval of six months only. But in the second chapter it is defined more clearly as taking place while P. Sulpicius Quirinus (Cyrenius) was governor of Syria.¹ This Quirinus, we are told, had been ordered to carry out an imperial decree for taxing 'all the world,' and in obedience to this decree Joseph and Mary came up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where the child was born. According to this narrative the taxing extended to the whole world—the *orbis Romanus*; but of such a general census at this time there is no evidence. Hence efforts have been made to prove that the phrase denotes Judæa only; but even if it could be proved that Jewish writers thus absurdly exaggerated the importance of their own small country, it is ridiculous to suppose that the Roman Cæsar would so fall in with their whims as to frame imperial decrees to suit them.² But no such census could be made in Judæa during the reign of Herod or of his son Archelaos, because such allied princes (*reges socii*) collected their own taxes, simply paying a tribute to the emperor. The idea that this taxing was an extraordinary measure resorted

¹ Dr. Milman, who speaks of the introduction of Quirinus ten years before his time as 'a trifling discrepancy, which would be easily pardoned in an ordinary historian,' contents himself chiefly with remarking that he 'cannot imagine a myth in such a plain prosaic sentence' as that which tells of this taxing or enrolment. But, when, as in this case, we have an alleged date on which other dates of importance may depend, the antedating or postdating of an event by eight or ten years can hardly be passed over as a venial mistake, though perhaps it might be forgiven in one who has a character for general accuracy. But the character of the evangelists for general accuracy has first to be established. The prosaic appearance of a passage is, however, no evidence for the absence of myth. Nothing can be more prosaic than the opening chapters of the history of Herodotos which speak of the abduction of Io, Medeia, and Helen. Every incident there described may have taken place, or might take place any day, and yet we do not believe them. Why? Because we know them on other grounds to be mythical.—Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, Book i. ch. 9, vol. i. p. 181, ed. 1878.

There can be no doubt that a plain prosaic style is the best possible vehicle for plausible fiction. We are, however, dealing with questions not of style, but of the truth of facts.

² For the difference between the account of this enrolment given by Justin and the narrative of Luke, see *Supernatural Religion*, i. 305-307. The version given by Justin makes it quite certain that he was not following the narrative of Luke, and, indeed, that he was ignorant of its existence.

to by Augustus during the reign of Archelaos, and before the reduction of Judæa to the form of a province, is set at rest by the plain assertion of the third Gospel that it took place during the governorship of Quirinus, who was not appointed to this office till long after the death of Herod, and whose census did not take place till about ten years after the time at which, according to the two Gospels, Jesus was born. Yet it will not do to say that Jesus really was born at this later time, for such a supposition completely upsets the *whole narrative* as given in the first Gospel.¹

We have already seen that the genealogies in the first and third Gospels could have been drawn up only by men who believed that Jesus was the son of Joseph by natural descent, and that they were adopted by the evangelists only as coming down to them among other materials which they found ready to their hands. Perhaps the same conclusion may be forced upon us on a comparison of the second and fourth Gospels with the narratives of the birth and infancy of Jesus contained in the other two. In Mark, although nothing is said of his earlier years, his baptism is

¹ In his efforts to get over such difficulties as these, Dr. Milman was led to complain that 'no cross-examination in an English court of law was ever so severe as that to which every word and shade of expression in the Evangelists is submitted.' It is not easy to determine precisely what meaning Dr. Milman intended to convey by these words; but, in their ordinary acceptation, the proposition may be met by a complete denial. The early history of Rome has been submitted to a scrutiny, certainly not less severe, and probably far more rigid; and until the assaults of Cornewall Lewis on the narratives of Livy, Dionysios, Diodoros, and others, have been repelled, it is useless to resort to the *argumentum ad misericordiam* on behalf of the Gospel narratives. We admit at once that, if the evangelists are to be regarded as ordinary historians, we have no right to require more than ordinary historic accuracy. The gist of the charges against the evangelists is that we nowhere find any such ordinary historic accuracy in their writings, and that we see absolutely no symptom of that 'inflexible love of truth, which, being inseparable from the spirit of Christianity, would of itself be a sufficient guarantee for fidelity and honesty.' If by truth be meant only certain foregone dogmatic conclusions, their love of it may perhaps have been inflexible; but if we mean by the phrase simply a determination to know, if we can, whether certain alleged events took place, or did not take place, we may be much more nearly justified in saying that very seldom have writers shown themselves so completely dead to historical truth. It is enough to say that the best opponent of Dr. Milman is Dr. Milman himself. See note ¹, p. 178.

Dean Milman seems to enter on perilous ground when, admitting the existence of a mythical belief in certain stages of human history, he asserts that,

noticed as the starting-point of his ministry; nor can there be any doubt, even from the wording of the accounts as they have been transmitted to us, that the writers who drew up the earliest narratives of the baptism regarded that event as his consecration to his Messiahship. In the Synoptic Gospels it is immediately followed by the Temptation, as though he were now placed in a different relation to the world from that which he had held before. But in the fourth Gospel neither the extraordinary conception, nor the birth, infancy, baptism, or temptation of Jesus receives any notice. John the Baptist is, indeed, mentioned; but he is brought in only to confess his ignorance of Jesus, whom in Luke he had recognised and revered while yet in the womb of his mother Elisabeth. This ignorance in the fourth Gospel continues until he sees the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and lighting upon Jesus, whereas in the other Gospels he knows Jesus as soon as he approaches, and meets him with the acknowledgement of his unworthiness to baptize him. The reason for this singular silence, in contrast with the method of the Synoptists, may perhaps be found in theories of the Messiahship entertained in the second century. In the account of the baptism cited by Justin Martyr

whether certain alleged angelic manifestations or other prodigies 'were actual appearances or impressions produced on the minds of those who witnessed them, is of slight importance. In either case they are real historical facts.'—*History of Christianity*, i. 131. They are not, necessarily, anything of the kind. Herodotus tells us that, before setting out on his expedition against the Greeks, Xerxes saw a dream which assured him of victory; and that the incredulous Artabanos was conquered by the same dream when it visited himself. Here we have first to determine whether the story be a fiction of Herodotus. If it be, we cast it aside at once, and there is an end of the matter. But if we decline to do this, we may conclude (1) that Xerxes actually saw the Dream-God and heard his voice; and in this case the vision is as much a historical fact as the repeal of the Corn Laws, although from its very nature it is impossible to verify the fact, which, therefore, loses all value for us; or (2) we may say that, by some means or other, impressions favourable to the result of the expedition were produced on the mind of Xerxes and his uncle. In this case the impression (which we are likewise unable to verify, and which, therefore, has no value for us) is a historical fact; but the dream or vision is not a historical fact; and nothing can set aside this distinction, which at once severs all narratives of facts which may be verified, from fictitious tales or from possible incidents, of the actual occurrence of which we can never satisfy ourselves. To treat the latter in any other way is to do violence to our sense of truth, and to impart a factitious strength to subterfuge and falsehood.

from the 'Memorials of the Apostles,' we are told that as Jesus went down into the waters a fire was kindled in Jordan, and a voice was heard which said, 'Thou art my beloved Son: this day have I begotten thee.' Now Justin is here arguing that Jesus is the pre-existing Son or Wisdom who has become incarnate by the will of God; and therefore in quoting this form of the words he was employing a form which tells against his argument. Had he known the version given in our Gospels he must inevitably have cited it in preference to the one which he found in the 'Memorials of the Apostles.'¹ The exact quotation from the second Psalm, 'This day have I begotten thee,' had become inappropriate when the earlier belief had given place to the idea that his consecration dated from the moment of his conception in his mother's womb, as announced to Joseph in the first Gospel and to Mary in the third. It was certain, therefore, that the words of the Divine utterance would be modified, as they are modified in our canonical Gospels. But Justin had already advanced to a further point than this, and was far on the road to a belief akin to that of our fourth evangelist. When the belief that the consecration of Jesus dated from the moment of his conception had given place to the idea of the Logos co-existing from eternity with the Father, and only taking upon him a covering or tabernacle of flesh² in order to manifest himself to the world, and when the Messiahship became thus the inalienable prerogative of the eternal Wisdom, the notion of his consecration to the Messiahship by baptism, or even by the miraculous conception, became both inadequate and incongruous. No consecration could be needed for the true Light which enlightens every man coming into the world; and anything that drew attention to events in his earthly life, as marking the moment of his call to the Messiahship, was felt to be an interference with the higher view which the writer of the fourth Gospel manifestly

¹ It follows irresistibly that Justin was not acquainted with any of our Gospels, and therefore that from Justin himself we have no evidence that our Gospels existed in his day. See above, p. 81, and *Supernatural Religion*, i. 318 *et seq.*

² ἐσκήρωσε, John i. 14.

held to be the only true one. Hence of the opening narratives of the first and third Gospels he could make no use, nor had he any further need of John the Baptist than to introduce him as a witness to the transcendent glory of the Eternal Word. John comes in, therefore, simply to deliver this testimony; and the narratives of the baptism, the temptation, the nativity, and the conception are dispensed with altogether.

The conclusion is, that in reference to all the events and incidents attendant on the birth and infancy of Jesus, our canonical Gospels contradict or exclude each other, and that the narratives of these events are, therefore, altogether untrustworthy and unhistorical. It is scarcely necessary to add that this conclusion has nothing to do with any stories of extraordinary or prodigious occurrences. These records are not to be trusted when they relate to ordinary things, and are therefore of no force whatever when they relate to things unusual or wonderful.

BOOK III

THE MINISTRY

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

ACCORDING to the third Gospel, and the third Gospel only, the perfect obscurity of the early life of Jesus was broken by an incident which marked a visit to Jerusalem at the time of the passover, when he was twelve years old. At this age, at which a child, it is said, was held to be capable of taking part in public religious services, he was brought to Jerusalem by his parents, who, on their return after the feast, set off without the child, and completed a day's journey without looking after him, being under the impression that he must be with kinsfolk or friends in the caravan. When, however, they fail to see him in the company, they go back to the city in great anxiety, and after a sorrowful search find him three days later discoursing with the doctors in the temple. On being informed of their distress, he expresses his wonder at their seeking him, and asks them how they came to show themselves so unconscious of his divine mission.

The question was perfectly pertinent; and it brings before us one of the greatest difficulties in the Gospel narratives, a difficulty which we shall have to mark again and again. If the writer, or writers, of the third Gospel be in any way worthy of trust, Mary had been distinctly told at the time of the annunciation that she was to be the mother of a child who, as being the Son of the

Highest, should have the throne of his father David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever. This plain declaration was, as we have seen,¹ either forgotten by Mary or disregarded. The former hypothesis charges her with singular stupidity, the latter with something like unbelief, for if she had been convinced that the angel Gabriel had told her the truth, no room would have been left for the wonder expressed by her at the words of Simeon when he came into the temple at the time of the presentation (Luke ii. 33). In this instance the astonishment was shared by Joseph, who, we might suppose, must have learnt from Mary the circumstances of the angel's visit, and the general tenor of his message.

But even if he had not, we are told in the first Gospel (i. 21) that in a vision specially vouchsafed to himself he was informed of the high destiny of his reputed son. Yet so weak is his memory or his belief, and so little do either Mary or her kinsfolk or their friends bear in mind the events attending his birth at Bethlehem,—the coming of the wise men, the slaughter of the children, the song of the heavenly messengers,—that none could speak decisively, or indeed at all, of his birthplace at a time when, according to the mind of the evangelist, it was of vital importance that it should be ascertained and made generally known. The whole story, in short, seems to have passed clean out of mind, and Jesus himself is never represented as correcting that erroneous impression of his birth at Nazareth, which, according to the evangelist, interfered with the acknowledgement of his Messianic character by the Jews.

From the narrative of the conversation with the doctors we learn that this forgetfulness was as complete in his twelfth year as ever it was in his thirtieth. Far from dismissing all anxious thoughts at the absence of the child, of whom, even according to our modern notions, they ought not thus to have lost sight, they not only give no sign of thinking that he was different from other children, but do not seek him in the temple till they have despaired of finding him anywhere else. Yet to the temple they should have gone, not only if they had the slightest faith in his mission and

¹ See p. 182.

the faintest remembrance of past years, but because the temple was the most likely place in which a child of the disposition ascribed to him would be found. Instead of this, we have the plain avowal of their distress, and the assertion, repeated on every occasion, that his mother pondered in her heart sayings which appear never to have produced any result.

There remain other difficulties scarcely less serious. Jesus was found, according to Dr. Milman,¹ in one of the chambers within the precincts of the temple set apart for public instruction. 'Jesus was seated, as the scholars usually were, and at his familiarity with the law, and the depth and subtlety of his questions, the learned men were in the utmost astonishment; the phrase may perhaps bear the stronger sense, they were in an ecstasy of admiration.'² Unquestionably it must have been a wonderful display of learning which could thus excite the astonishment of the wisest of Jewish rabbis. Whence, then, had this learning been obtained? If by any means beyond human reach, or by virtue of his omniscience as the Word Incarnate, the assertion is self-contradictory, for omniscience excludes all advancement or degrees in knowledge, while it contradicts the express statement that Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature as well as in favour with God and man. Certainly, according to the Gospels, neither Joseph nor Mary had any large stores of legal erudition; and Dean Milman asserts that the putting of these questions presupposes a wide acquaintance 'with the sacred writings and institutes of the country.' This implies either instruction by others or a marvellous self-application. In either case it must have been perfectly well known that Jesus was a youth, not only (as the author of *Ecce Homo* phrased it) 'of great promise,' but of vast learning, acquired in the ordinary way by reading books as well as by serious thought.

¹ *History of Christianity*, Book i. ch. 3.

² The Jewish tradition is that the scholars stood, while receiving instruction, till after the death of Gamaliel. The point is of little consequence, except as showing that, if the tradition be true, the evangelist has antedated the practice by somewhat more than forty years. It follows in this case that this narrative was not put together before the death of Gamaliel.

Thus, then, we have the alleged historical fact, that twelve years after the birth at Bethlehem the great rabbis of Jerusalem were filled with astonishment, not merely at the genius, but at the learning of Jesus. Some of these must have been alive when, scarcely twenty years later, Jesus appeared in the temple on the occasion described in the seventh chapter of the fourth Gospel. The identity of his name, and his advent from Galilee, where they knew that his reputation was growing, must have recalled to their minds the incidents of that day on which the distressed Galilæan parents came in quest of the child whose wisdom was so astonishing them. Yet all that they can do is to ask, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learnt?' If it be urged in reply that they were mistaken, it may be answered that Jesus says not a word to correct the erroneous impression, and that his kinsfolk and friends labour under the same delusion. At the end of the series of parables given in Matthew xiii., the same question is asked by those who were quite familiar with his lineage and kindred, and who seem to assume that the sons of carpenters have no great opportunities for acquiring deep learning. It is asked again in Mark vi. 12, and in the same words, after the raising of the daughter of Jairos, and in a modified form in the third Gospel, which relates his astonishing discourse in the synagogue (Luke iv. 22).

But great as is the learning of Jesus, his obedience to his parents is unhesitating. This, perhaps, might be expected. Yet, if the latter had by his question been recalled to the memory of the very plain words spoken by Gabriel, and of the marvellous events attending his birth, it seems strange that they should have summarily withdrawn him from a spot where he might have been about his Father's business, to the obscure retirement of Nazareth.

We may, if we please, attribute weakness of brain rather than want of faith to Mary and Joseph; but this will scarcely be done by any who accept the popular tradition. Yet, if they reject this alternative, they are confronted by a grave historical difficulty,

for if Mary had really heard the words put into the mouth of Gabriel, if Joseph had really learnt in a vision the character of his real or reputed son, if they had believed the shepherds of Bethlehem and the wise men of the East, or Simeon, or Anna, if they had journeyed in haste and secrecy into Egypt, and had returned privately to Nazareth, it is a sheer impossibility that they could fail to understand the question put to them by Jesus in the temple. But we are told plainly that they did not understand it; and thus one of two conclusions is forced upon us,—either (1) that they were unable to understand, because these earlier events had not happened, or (2) that these events had happened, and, therefore, that the evangelist is mistaken in saying that his question was unintelligible to them.

In this story, then, we have a narrative which cannot be reconciled with the earlier or later portions of the history, and is, in fact, completely contradicted by them. Hence, without committing ourselves to the statement that no such incident ever took place, we are driven to the conclusion that, if it did take place, the later recorded incidents must be false, or that, if the latter be true, the conversation in the temple is a fiction. In either case, we have before us a narrative which is not historical; and thus our knowledge of the boyhood of Jesus becomes as shadowy as our knowledge of the events which are said to have occurred at the time of his birth.

With this conclusion our task in reference to this narrative is ended. We may have to use a like form of words after the examination of every incident in the stories of the ministry and the passion; but, none the less, if so it should be, it is no part of our duty to account for the mode in which the legend came into existence. The so-called mythical theory may or may not explain the result; but, whatever may be his own leanings, the historical critic refuses to commit himself to any theories, however plausible or even probable they may appear to him. It may, however, be worth while to note the parallels furnished in earlier Jewish history. The growth of Jesus in wisdom and goodness is

described in words almost identical with those which are applied to Samuel (1 Sam. ii. 26), and not unlike those which describe the early growth of Samson. The precocity of Moses answers to the marvellous wisdom of Jesus. As the latter is found in the temple seated among grave doctors, so Moses, according to Philon, eschews all amusements, and surpasses all his tutors in genius and learning. Later tradition spoke of Samuel as prophesying in his twelfth year, and the so-called Ignatius, in the letter to the Magnesians, relates that the wise judgements of Solomon and Daniel were given when they were twelve years old. Greek legend furnishes a similar instance in Minos, who, at the age of nine years,¹ became king of Crete, and displayed the profound wisdom of Menu and Zoroaster. Such national legends as these may account for the growth of a like tale to illustrate the boyhood of Jesus; but whether they do so or not, the narrative remains unhistorical.

¹ The laws of Minos and the Institutes of Menu are, in fact, the same thing; but the age of the Cretan king turns on the interpretation of the word *ἐννέωπος*, in *Odyss.* xi. 310. Colonel Mure, *Critical History of Greek Literature*, Book ii. ch. xiii. 97, is probably right in denying that the word had originally any connexion with the numeral *nine*. But there is no doubt that this was the later belief, and it coincides with the Jewish tradition.

CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONS OF JESUS WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST

§ 1. *The Mission of John the Baptist.*

THAT the name of Jesus of Nazareth is intimately connected with a great change, both of thought and practice, in the Western as well as in the Eastern world, cannot be disputed. Nor will the most rigid impartiality seek to repress the wish to know all that can be known of one to whom so great and mighty a work has been attributed. More especially will every detail be welcome which seems likely to throw light on the several influences to which in his earlier years he may have been subjected. Now, although contradictory reasons are given in the first and third Gospels for the birth in Bethlehem, yet all agree in making Nazareth his permanent abode, and in representing him as the son, or reputed son, of Joseph the carpenter.¹ If we take this tradition to be correct, his opportunities for learning would be those of an artisan's family in the remote districts of Galilee; and if, further, we accept the hypothesis of Joseph's poverty, an additional drawback is furnished in his position.² At Jerusalem, however, on the yearly recurrence of the Paschal and other festivals, he would obtain some knowledge of the intellectual and religious movements of the age. With the Sadducees he would have, per-

¹ See Appendix B.

² This notion cannot well be reconciled with the assertion that Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem because she was an heiress with landed property in that district.

haps, no great acquaintance.¹ The members of this sect or party belonged chiefly to the higher and more wealthy classes; and although, from the absence of strong censures such as were directed against the Pharisees, it might be supposed that he had a friendly feeling for this school, their unbelief in the life to come seems altogether to preclude this idea. With the Pharisees he had certainly more in common. Their belief in purely spiritual existences, in the continued life, and in a progressive developement of Judaism from the days of Moses, furnished the groundwork of a faith so far in accordance with that which was taught by himself; and the dissipation of Pharisaic prejudices at once converted Saul of Tarsus into the most devoted of Christian missionaries. With the Essenes many have supposed that he had a still closer connexion. Both favoured a community of goods, prohibited oaths, enjoined obedience to constituted authority, and insisted on the duty of despising riches, and of travelling without resources. But points of difference, still more numerous and important, may be found in the contracted spirit of the Essenes, their rigid observance of the Sabbath, and their constant purifications. This sect, we may add, is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament writings.

But if the influence exercised by these sects on the mind of Jesus may not have been great, and although we have no means of measuring that of the foreign Jews, as of Alexandria and Kyrene, with whom he may have been brought into contact at Jerusalem, one most important person at the very threshold of his ministry is brought before us in John the Baptist.

The date of John's first appearance as a preacher is fixed by the third evangelist in the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius, when Pilate was governor of Judæa, Herod Antipas tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and Trachonitis. Whether John really began to preach at this time is another question; but at the time mentioned, Pilate, Antipas, and Philip held

¹ There have not been wanting those who have ascribed the extraordinary powers attributed to Jesus to mystical lore acquired during the sojourn in Egypt, forgetting that at that time he was only a few months old.

the offices here assigned to them. The evangelist, however, seems to have been misled by notices which spoke of an Abilene of Lysanias, into thinking that Lysanias was tetrarch at that time. No such person is mentioned by Josephus.

The other Gospels furnish no help towards fixing the date of John's mission. The expression of the first Gospel (iii. 1), if taken strictly, would imply that he appeared in the wilderness at the time of the return of Joseph and Mary from Egypt,—that is, when Jesus and John himself were infants. But it may be stated, once for all, that no chronology whatever can be obtained from the first and second Gospels. Like beads strung on a necklace, their narratives have a certain sequence; but there is no reason why many, if not most, of the events should be given in one connexion rather than in another. From such notes of time as 'in those days John came preaching' (Matt. iii. 1), 'then cometh Jesus to be baptized' (iii. 13), 'then he was led up to be tried' [tempted] (iv. 1), and the like, we can learn nothing. It is important, however, to note that in the first and second Gospels Jesus is described as having not so much as entered Jerusalem after the beginning of his ministry until he came to it for the passover which immediately preceded the crucifixion. Nor is anything said in any of the Synoptics which would render it necessary to suppose that the ministry of Jesus extended over more than a single year. The arrangement which lengthens his public life to three years is obtained from the fourth Gospel; but this Gospel exhibits a fatal contradiction to the rest by describing the crucifixion as preceding the passover, whereas, in the other three, Jesus had already kept the passover with his disciples on the evening before he suffered.¹ Hence of the chronology of the Baptist's life we learn nothing with certainty from our four Gospels.

But the narrative is also contradicted by incidental statements

¹ This contradiction (together with the fact that Polykrates of Ephesus and the Asiatic bishops appealed to the personal authority of the apostle John as their justification for not adopting the Western rule for the celebration of Easter), furnishes the strongest evidence for the post-apostolic authorship of the fourth Gospel. See above, p. 124.

which cannot be overlooked. There can be no doubt that the elaborate notes of time given in Luke iii. 1 are designed to fix the date of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus rather than that of John. The first and second Gospels, as we have remarked, tell us nothing definite about the time; but they all imply that the baptism of Jesus took place soon after the beginning of John's preaching; and they are more explicit in closing the Baptist's career soon after that event. The Gospels of Matthew (iv. 12) and Mark (i. 14) imply that John was arrested during the first days of the trying or tempting of Jesus, and the mission of the two disciples (Matt. xi. 2) is described as taking place during his imprisonment.¹

Thus, according to all the Gospels (unless possibly the third is to be excepted), the public career of the Baptist seems to be bounded within the space of a few months. But, on the other hand, John is represented not merely as baptizing, but as teaching his disciples and imparting to them a form of prayer.² He is described as leaving behind him a definite school, which adhered to his baptism long after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.³ The language of Josephus (*Ant.* xviii. 5. 2) can apply only to a man who has made a profound impression upon his contemporaries. This is not done in a day; and hence have arisen many expedients for reconciling the Gospel narratives with a more extended career for the Baptist. They are all flimsy enough; for, if it be suggested that Jesus after his baptism remained for a long time the follower of John, or went again into retirement, it must be answered that such a notion contradicts the statements of the Gospels, which plainly speak of the Temptation as immediately consequent on

¹ In Luke vii. 18 the disciples are apparently sent by John while he was still at large.

² Luke xi. 1. The prayer of the Baptist and that which is commonly called the Lord's Prayer are thus forms of prayer to be used as a distinguishing mark of a separate school. It is not, of course, meant that the disciples of John or of Jesus did not know how to pray, or had never prayed, until they severally had these forms put before them.

³ Acts xviii. 25-xix. 3.

the baptism, and the Ministry as beginning immediately after the trying. The first chapter of the Acts¹ gives the baptism by John as the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. If, on the other hand, it be urged that Jesus deferred his baptism to a late period of John's ministry, the reply is that this hypothesis is contradicted by express statements of the third Gospel, which represent Jesus and John as both beginning their public career in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and, further, describe John as only six months older than Jesus.

We have thus marks of time which are hopelessly inconsistent with the work which the Baptist is said to have performed, and the establishment of the school which adhered to his particular rite of initiation. With the pointing out of this inconsistency and, therefore, of the unhistorical character of the narrative, our task is on this topic ended. The Gospel versions of the facts may, perhaps, be in some degree accounted for by the necessities imposed upon writers who wished to represent the Baptist, not as the founder of a school or an independent reformer, but as a mere forerunner of the Messiah. But whether this explanation be accepted or rejected, the narrative as given to us in the Gospels remains untrustworthy. In other words, it must, like the rest, be set down as unhistorical.

§ 2. *John as the Forerunner of the Messiah.*

A far more important issue is involved in the inquiry whether John ever regarded Jesus as the Messiah to whom, under such various forms and with such different attributes, the Jews looked for deliverance from their enemies, and who was for them an earthly prince rather than the healer who raises sinners from spiritual death. On this subject there was probably little difference of thought between the disciples of Jesus and those of the Baptist; and the history of the Gospels is a history which seems to show that to their idea of the secular king the disciples of

¹ Verse 22. See p. 57.

Jesus clung to the last. We must therefore take the stories as we find them, and we must inquire whether the Baptist ever looked on his kinsman as, in the Jewish sense, the anointed king who was to sit on the throne of David for ever. This question may, indeed, be regarded as the crucial test of the traditional belief, for, if the relation of John to Jesus was not that which it is described as having been, all that has been built on the fulfilment of so-called Messianic predictions which speak of Elias as coming before the great day of the Lord, on his testimony to Jesus as the Lamb of God, and on the subordination of the Jewish to the Christian dispensation in the person of the Baptist, falls to the ground.

In all the Gospels John is represented as baptizing with water to repentance; and it may be admitted at once, that the fact of his using baptism as his rite of initiation is historical. This much is expressly stated by Josephus,¹ who, however, does not connect the ministry of John with any Messianic idea. But perhaps this silence may be sufficiently accounted for by the position of a writer who, for political reasons, wished to keep in the background all that related to the Messianic dreams and expectations of his countrymen.

Further, in the Gospels, Jesus and John are described as belonging to the same family. They are cousins; and their mothers were in each case informed distinctly, before the birth of their children, how great the work was which they would have to do. On the approach of Mary the babe had leaped in his mother's womb, and the two parents had given thanks together for the high privileges vouchsafed to them. They were thus perfectly conscious of the relation in which their sons were to stand to each other; and it is absolutely inconceivable that they should not impart to their children the knowledge thus wonderfully bestowed upon themselves. It is, in truth, incredible that it should not be the subject of their daily and hourly talk. It is true that, according to the first Gospel, they were separated for a few months, perhaps a year, during the sojourn in Egypt; but at Nazareth the

¹ *Ant.* xviii. 5. 2.

opportunities for intercourse became just what they had been before ;¹ and according to the third Gospel, there was not even the interruption of the Egyptian exile, for at the ordinary time the child is taken quietly to Jerusalem for presentation in the temple, and is thence conveyed as quietly to Nazareth. Thus, then, John and Jesus were from the first most intimately acquainted with each other. There had been, in fact, no time during which they had not known each other since they were infants ; and the relation of John to his Master must have been a thousand times acknowledged before the baptism in Jordan. The words of John in the Synoptics are fairly in accordance with the subordination predetermined for him when his birth was announced to Zacharias. Jesus is hailed by the Baptist on his first appearance as one higher than himself ; and the convictions of John are in no way whatever dependent on the signs at the time of the baptism. In the fourth Gospel John has no previous knowledge of Jesus. He says expressly, ' I knew him not. But he² that sent me to baptize with water said to me, On whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.' This, sign, according to the fourth Gospel, was vouchsafed ; but we are not told that there was any baptism. We have already seen why there could be none in the pages of the Johannine evangelist.³

To get rid of the grave difficulty thus caused, some have not scrupled to suggest that John's ignorance of Jesus in the fourth Gospel relates not to the person of Jesus, but solely to his

¹ Some have not hesitated to allege the distance which separated them as a reason for the discontinuance of the intercourse between the two families. But it has been well asked how, if Mary should have been able to perform the journey when she was with child, the task should deter two youths growing into manhood, and how indifference on such a point as this can spring from anything but unbelief in the promises which are said to have been made to Mary, Joseph, and Zacharias, or from ignorance of them. The latter theory is virtually the assertion that the promises were never made, and that the whole narrative is a fiction.

² This must be God himself ; and the recognition of Jesus by John is thus the result of a special divine revelation made to the Baptist personally.

³ See p. 193.

Messianic character. In other words, he was perfectly aware that Jesus was his cousin, but had no suspicion that he was more than any ordinary person. From this it would follow (1) that neither of them had heard from his mother the story of the incidents which preceded and attended their birth; or (2) that, if they had heard them, they did not believe them.

It follows, further, that we have no historical grounds for thinking that there was any genealogical connexion between John and Jesus. No such connexion is stated, or even hinted at, in the first two or the fourth Gospels. The first Gospel actually excludes the visit of Mary to Elisabeth, while the third Gospel contradicts itself. The announcement of Gabriel is here very clearly designed to remove all possible cause of offence at the discovery that Mary was with child. Yet Mary says not a word, but leaves Joseph to find out as best he may the true state of a case which a pure-minded woman would have been most eager to explain. We have, therefore, no historical warrant for believing that John was only six months¹ older than Jesus; or that there was any kindred between the two families, or any intimacy between the two mothers. In other words, the narratives relating to these alleged facts are unhistorical; and we have nothing to do with explaining how they came into existence.

§ 3. *The Acknowledgement of the Messiahship of Jesus by
John the Baptist.*

The fact that the Baptist acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah looked for by himself and by the Jewish people is not distinctly stated in any of the Synoptic Gospels. It might, further, be very legitimately maintained that the words ascribed to him in these Gospels have no necessary reference to Jesus. All that is

¹ According to this notion, Christian art should represent Jesus and John with the Virgin Mother as children of much the same size. As a matter of fact, Jesus is much more commonly painted as the infant, while the Baptist stands beside him as a youth or young man.

implied in his preaching is that his own baptism of water was designed as a preparation for the Messianic kingdom, and that the Messiah, or prince, or king, who should follow him, would baptize with fire; but although he is represented as avowing his conviction that the kingdom of heaven had drawn near, there is nothing to show that he regarded the actual coming of Messiah as an event which he should live to see, still less that he looked upon Jesus as that Messiah of whom he was the appointed fore-runner.

Nothing more than this can be extracted from the Synoptics, for the vague expression of unworthiness on John's part, in Matthew (iii. 14), falls immeasurably short of the declarations contained in the fourth Gospel, and in the fourth Gospel only. Hence, so far as the first three Gospels are concerned, it is left quite an open question whether, after the commencement of the public ministry of Jesus, John began to think that his inmost and dearest expectations might be realised in the son of Joseph and Mary; whether, in consequence of expressions uttered by John to this effect, some of his disciples left him and attached themselves to Jesus;¹ or whether, on the other hand, his school retained its independence and failed to be convinced by the works or the teaching of Jesus that he was the Messianic king looked for by the Baptist. This latter conclusion receives no small support from the facts mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles,² if that narrative be regarded as having for any part an historical basis.

The fourth Gospel, it is true, brings before us a wholly different picture. The difficulties involved in the Johannine statement of John's ignorance of the person of Jesus until after he had seen the heavenly signs which revealed his character, have been noticed in the last section. We have now to mark those which we encounter in the words there put into the mouth of the Baptist.

Dr. Milman considers it emphatically 'a remarkable fact in the history of Christianity that from the very first appearance of

¹ John i. 37.

² xviii. 21-xix. 3.

Jesus on the shores of the Jordan, unquestionably before he had displayed his powers or openly asserted his title to the higher place, John should invariably retain his humbler relative position. Such was his uniform language from the commencement of his career. Such it continued to the end. . . . This has always appeared to me one of the most striking incidental arguments for the truth of the evangelic narrative, and, consequently, of the Christian faith. The recognition appears to have been instant and immediate. Hitherto, the Baptist had insisted on the purification of all who had assembled around him, and, with the commanding dignity of a Heaven-commissioned teacher, had rebuked without distinction the sins of all classes and all sects. In Jesus alone, by his refusal to baptize him, he acknowledges the immaculate purity, while his deference assumes the tone of homage, almost of adoration.’¹ In this passage Dr. Milman seems to have formed his idea by confusing the narrative of the Synoptic Gospels with the account of the fourth Gospel, and by interpreting the former in the light thrown on it by his own prepossessions. The hypothesis of an ‘instant and immediate recognition’ is not only not upheld, it is positively excluded, by the statements in John i. 32, 33; and the recognition in the Synoptic Gospels is the result strictly of previous personal knowledge. But an acknowledgement of ‘immaculate purity’ can be inferred from John’s general admission of comparative unworthiness only by those who have received the idea from other sources (as from the fourth Gospel in contradistinction to the other three); nor can the utmost straining convert the deference of his tone into anything like adoration.

Two serious difficulties, not yet noticed, are involved in Dr. Milman’s assertion that John invariably from the first retained his humble position, and that his language in reference to Jesus was, therefore, uniform throughout his whole career. The former of these concerns Dr. Milman’s consistency with himself; the latter affects the credibility of the Gospel narrative. If the Baptist’s language was uniform, and if his language was that

¹ *History of Christianity*, Book i. ch. iii.

which is attributed to him in the fourth Gospel, then John was as thoroughly convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus, in the very highest sense of the word, as any Christian of the present day could possibly be. Nay, more; John, during the whole of the ministry of Jesus, rises altogether above the thicker mental atmosphere of the apostles or missionaries to that transcendental region which was reached afterwards by the writer of the fourth Gospel. Not one of the disciples before the crucifixion had, if we follow the Synoptics, attained to the idea of a suffering Messiah. The notion, when first propounded,¹ was simply a cause of offence. But the Lamb of God (John i. 36) is pre-eminently the image of patience; and the idea immediately connected with it by the language of the Old Testament writings is not merely that of suffering, but of vicarious suffering. Further yet, John acknowledges his Messiahship as the Eternal Logos (John i. 30). Precedence in earthly age by a few weeks could not possibly be the meaning attached to the words, 'he is preferred before me, for he was before me,' by that writer in whose belief 'the Word was in the beginning with God, and was God.' This, then, was the idea of the Messiahship of Jesus which the fourth Gospel emphatically attributes to the Baptist. It is an idea not merely entertained by him in secret, but openly and repeatedly imparted by him to his disciples;² and thus John was in the habit of insisting on statements which, when made by Peter in much feebler form and with far narrower meaning, are said to have called down upon him a special blessing as the recipient of a divine revelation.³ This, then, if the narrative of the Johannine Gospel is not to be rejected, must have been the uniform language of the Baptist respecting Jesus. It is strange that the Synoptics should not drop so much as the faintest hint to this effect; but apart from this, it is obvious that such convictions cannot admit of degrees. No man could regard another as the tabernacle in which the Eternal Logos had taken up his abode, and then speak of him in words which imply uncertainty or want of faith in his mission. The conception, if

¹ Matt. xvi. 22.² John i. 29, 36.³ Matt. xvi. 16, 17.

it be present, must be clear and distinct as the lines of Alpine mountain-forms against a cloudless sky. But, in spite of all this, Dr. Milman goes on to say: 'It is assumed, I think without warrant, that John himself must have had a distinct and definite notion of the Messiahship of Jesus. He may have applied some of the prophetic or popular sayings supposed to have reference to a Messiah, without any precise notion of their meaning; and his conception of the Messiah's character, and of Jesus himself, may have varied during different passages of his own life.' But Dr. Milman, as we have seen, himself insisted most strongly that John's language respecting Jesus never varied, that it was uniform from the commencement of his career to the end; and as his language, so, Dr. Milman affirms, was his practice: 'he retained invariably his humbler relative position.' If, then, his language never varied, and if his practice, as the exponent of his belief, never altered; if, moreover, his language was that which the fourth Gospel asserts it to have been, how can it be said that his conceptions may have varied, or that the Baptist could be at any time without precise notions as to the character of the Christ? The views of Athanasius or Augustine could not be more dogmatically clear.

We have now to see, in the second place, how far the notion of a uniform testimony is corroborated or upheld by the statements of the evangelists. In Matthew xi. 2 (after the narrative of the mission of the Twelve), we are told that John from his prison sent two of his disciples to Jesus, charging them to ask, 'Art thou he that is coming, or do we look for another?' An account of the same incident, with some important modifications, is given in the seventh chapter of the third Gospel; but the evangelist here implies that at this time John was still at large.

This narrative seems at first sight to harmonise with the most genuine human experience. We can well imagine two friends, engaged in the same righteous and holy cause, working together for the benefit of their fellows, until circumstances part them. Time goes on, and their work is maintained with undiminished

zeal; but darker days come, and one of them finds himself a prisoner. He cannot go to his friend, but he can write to him, and in his letter he asks whether all the high hopes with which they started must be given up, and whether, after all, the results on which they had counted were ever to be looked for. His friend receives his message; and his answer is ready: 'I do not know whether my words can give you the comfort and strength which I heartily wish them to impart. I can but appeal to the work which is being done. I came here to a moral wilderness, where the very soil seemed to be poisoned, to a region full of spiritual sickness and utter degradation. I think I may say, taking the results of the work carried on during the years which have passed since we parted, that on this work the divine blessing has rested. I am sure of this, that in many and many a case the morally blind have received their sight, the mentally lame can walk, the deaf have recovered their powers of hearing, and the spiritually leprous have been cleansed. Nay, in a legion of instances, the spiritually dead are being raised; and, most of all, those who were utterly weighed down under the burden of evil and sin are being awakened to something like a real trust in the divine love of which I am always telling them. I can only hope, dear friend, that the tidings of all this work may cheer and hearten you. It is a day of small things for both of us; but there is a special blessing on those who will not allow themselves to be dismayed because the heaven above them seems to have grown dark. Our work is not all here; and we seek an abiding city elsewhere.'

We can well imagine that such words as these might be uttered or written in an age in which, to a moral certainty, any one of the phrases or expressions which have here a purely spiritual meaning would be translated into the language of concrete wonders. The deaf, the lame, the blind, the dead, would all be thrown back from the spiritual to the material world; and the result would be that which converted Gregory, the spiritual thaumaturge, into the performer of outward and sensible wonders and prodigies. It has taken place in reference to the story of the mission sent to Jesus

by John the Baptist. We see the actual process of conversion in the narrative of the third Gospel, where, between the question and the answer, a verse is inserted which is not found in Matthew. This verse declares that, on receiving the message, Jesus did some wonders of outward bodily healing, and then bade the disciples go and tell John of the prodigies which they had heard and seen, as though this could give him the least comfort or encouragement. What has been done here, has been done through the whole history of the Gospels.¹

But when we have translated the language of mere wonder-working back into the true utterances of the spiritual life, the fact remains that even the foundations of such a work cannot be laid in a month or a year, and that results must be patiently waited for. We are thus brought back to the impossible chronology of the evangelists—a chronology which may possibly have been determined for them by causes of which they were wholly unconscious.² As it is, if we read the story as I have just put it, we are rather converting it into a symbolical narrative than receiving it as it is told to us in the Gospels. We must, therefore, scrutinise it as the record of an incident imbedded in the story of the relations of John with Jesus.

According to the Synoptics the mission of John's disciples could be prompted only by one of two motives. Either the faith of John himself was wavering; or, being fully convinced himself, he wished to overcome the disbelief of his disciples. Did John, then, send them from the former motive? Put in another form, the question is equivalent to the inquiry whether his faith could by any possibility fail, or even waver, when he had known from his infancy his own position in relation to Jesus; when he had been told by his father and his mother of the events which preceded and accompanied his own birth and that of Jesus; when he was well acquainted with his father's hymn which told him that he should be the prophet of the Highest, as going before the face of Messiah to prepare his ways; when he had heard of

¹ See Appendix A.

² See Appendix B.

Gabriel's announcement to Mary that Jesus should possess the throne of David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and still more, when he had himself interpreted these predictions in a sense more spiritual than any which the disciples of Jesus attained till long after the time assigned for the crucifixion; when he had spoken of him as the pure and suffering Lamb of God, and acknowledged his pre-existence as the Eternal Word. Such a lapse may be considered as psychologically impossible. The ascription of such doubt makes John, indeed, as 'a reed shaken by the wind'—an imputation summarily rejected by Jesus himself.

If it be urged, as some have thought, that these doubts were caused in the mind of John by his own loss of liberty, it may be replied that this involves a much graver imputation on the solidity of his character. Whatever might be his anticipations of the temporal as well as the spiritual kingship of the Christ, his character could not be one of the strongest, if imprisonment thus enfeebled his deepest convictions. John knew, as well as any others, what had been the recompence of prophets and righteous men in past ages; and he must have known that so it would be still, until the Messiah should appear in his invincible majesty—in other words, until righteousness is finally victorious over wrong. If the narrative of the second Gospel may be trusted, he must further have known that he was regarded with very friendly feelings by the tetrarch himself, and might, therefore, reasonably hope to be set at liberty by him in the end.¹

If the text of the first and third Gospels be correct, John sent his disciples because he had heard of the works done by Jesus.

¹ Mark vi. 20. Nothing is gained by comparing John to Galileo, Cranmer, and others, who have recanted opinions previously avowed, in order to regain their freedom. In all such cases men express themselves shaken in those particular opinions which led to their imprisonment, and not in any others. Thus Galileo, it is said, was shut up for asserting the motion of the earth round the sun: by denying that motion he hoped to recover his liberty. On this principle the Baptist should have expressed misgiving, not as to the Messiahship of Jesus, which had nothing whatever to do with his imprisonment, but as to the justice of his reproof of Herod for his alleged incestuous marriage with his brother Philip's wife.

We might be led to say that these were works of spiritual love and mercy, works of moral healing and of deliverance from spiritual death; but there can be no doubt that, in the minds of the evangelists, works of mere outward palpable thaumaturgy held the most prominent place. The thought of the higher work was not, indeed, shut out; but the idea of moral and spiritual healing was buried under the mass of sensible wonders which were supposed to accompany the spiritual works, and to serve as a guarantee of their reality. In Luke (vii. 18) their report, if the text be correct, is distinctly said to refer to the bodily raising of the widow's dead son at Nain. But these wonders would, in the judgement of the evangelists, be precisely those which would confirm his faith instead of suggesting doubts; and, therefore, if John had really regarded Jesus as the Messiah, the report brought by his disciples would have tallied with his own expectations. In the alleged fact that this report is made the occasion of a mission of inquiry we have one of the grounds which seem to warrant the conclusion that John had *not* hitherto (*i.e.* at any time before his imprisonment) acknowledged the Messiahship of Jesus.

If, then, he did not send his disciples because his own faith wavered, did he send them for the removal of their doubts—doubts which he did not himself share? In this case, must we not suppose that he had done all that he could to overcome the disbelief of these disciples, and, failing to do so by the expression of his own conviction and by a narrative of the incidents which took place at the baptism of Jesus, hoped to convince them by proofs similar to those which he had himself witnessed? The question is not easily answered; but it is clear that both the first and the third Gospels represent Jesus as understanding the inquiry to come from John on his own account, and not for the sake of his disciples, for his answer is, 'Go and tell John what things ye hear and see'; and he adds a rebuke to his inconstancy, or want of faith, in the words, 'Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me.'

We are thus brought to the conclusion that this question was suggested by doubts on the part of the Baptist himself; and

possibly it may have been such doubt, together, perhaps, with his asceticism and the formal character of his religion, which led Jesus, if the story be true, to speak of him as less than the least in the kingdom of heaven, even though he were a prophet and more than a prophet. It is also possible, and even likely, that no such words were ever spoken by Jesus; but if they were spoken, it becomes impossible to regard the opening narrative of the fourth Gospel as in any degree historical. Simon, the son of Jonas, is said to have received his name of Peter and to have been specially pronounced blessed because he declared Jesus to be the Anointed One, the Son of the living God, an acknowledgement in no way inconsistent with the supposition that his existence began with his life on earth. To the idea of a Messiah whose victory was to be won through suffering, Peter, according to the gospel story, never attained before the crucifixion. The Baptist alone, according to the fourth Gospel, pronounced him to be the Lamb of God who takes up and puts away all sin, and proclaimed his existence before all worlds as the Eternal Logos of God. How, then, could he whose faith was infinitely more true, more exalted, and more spiritual than that of any of the disciples of Jesus, be regarded as not within the pale of the divine kingdom? It follows, then, either that the statements of the fourth Gospel are true, and, in that case, Jesus never could have said what is attributed to him in Luke (vii. 28) and Matthew (xi. 11); or that he did speak thus disparagingly of the Baptist, and, in this case, the narrative of John (i. 29-36) is a fiction. If we conclude that Jesus ever so spoke of him, it is absolutely certain that the Baptist never could have risen to the height of spiritual discernment ascribed to him in the fourth Gospel. If, as according to this Gospel, the baptism of John was instituted especially for the purpose of bringing about the manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah to Israel, it follows that, as soon as this purpose was accomplished, his rite was no longer of any use, and, as being useless, should at once have been given up. Indeed, after his distinct admission that Jesus was the Lamb of God, he would, by continuing to baptize

and retain disciples about himself, be doing a wrong to every one so drawn and kept away from the Christ.¹ With this wrong he, alone, would be chargeable; for, while he told them verbally that Jesus was he that should come with the fiery baptism of the Spirit or Breath of God, he contradicted his own words by still continuing to administer his merely symbolical rite of baptism by water. If he really said what he is thus reported to have said, or if he believed what he said, it is simply inconceivable that he should have left behind him a school of followers who, years after the alleged time of the crucifixion, knew only his baptism, and had never so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost, or Spirit, or Breath.² With such convictions he must have attached himself to Jesus, or sent to Jesus all who came to him. As he seems to have done neither, we can only conclude that he did not entertain any such convictions.

On the historical doubts involved in John's power to despatch disciples from his place of confinement, there is no need to say much here. If the marriage of Antipas with Herodias was the cause of his imprisonment, some of his disciples might, perhaps, still be allowed to have access to their master. The difficulty arises on comparing the Gospel narratives with that of Josephus, which we shall have to notice presently.

On the whole, we have so far no actual historical evidence that John baptized Jesus. According to the fourth Gospel it would seem that he certainly did not. The other Gospels leave it possible, or probable, that he did. But as to anything further, we

¹ Thus the two disciples who hear him speak (John i. 37) immediately leave the Baptist and follow Jesus; and it was, by his own confession, his manifest duty to urge all others to do as these had done.

It may be remarked that this transference of two disciples from John to Jesus fills, in the fourth Gospel, the place which in the first and third Gospels is occupied by the mission of the two disciples from the prison at Machairous.

² If we are to take the words of Acts xix. 2, 3, as historical, it would follow that John, when he spoke of him who should come, *never spoke of baptism* with the Holy Ghost, although he may have mentioned the baptism of fire. Thus at almost each step that we take we find ourselves confronted by propositions, of which, as contradicting each other, one must be, and all may be, false.

have no evidence that John acknowledged him as the Messiah or deliverer; that he used a uniform language about him; still less that he used the language imputed to him in the fourth Gospel, or, indeed, that he applied to Jesus any Messianic phrases whatever. In addition to this we have to take into account the contradictions on the whole subject between the fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, and the fact that a school, professing to follow the Baptist, is said to have preserved its independence as late as the conversion of Apollos. We are thus brought to the conclusion that the Gospel accounts of the relations between John and Jesus are not trustworthy—or, to put it otherwise, are not historical; and, as before, we must repeat that, having shown this, we are not bound to show further how they came into existence.

§ 4. *The Deputation from Jerusalem to John the Baptist.*

In the third Gospel (iii. 15) the preaching of John the Baptist rouses in the hearts of all who heard him a musing that he might, perhaps, himself be the Messiah whose kingdom he proclaimed as nigh. In this account the inquiry whether he be the Christ proceeds from those who are well disposed to him, and who would gladly have their doubts solved in the affirmative. In his reply, John tells them simply that he baptizes them with water, but that one should come after him (he does not say *who* or *when*), who should baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

In the fourth Gospel this question is put to him, not by the people, but by deputies from the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem; and the inquiry assumes a threefold form. To the questions whether he be the Christ or Messiah, or whether he be Elijah, or the prophet (Jeremiah), he answers directly in the negative. But when, having described himself as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, he is asked by what authority he presumes to baptize, he answers, not, as in the third Gospel, by saying indefinitely that the Messiah would one day come, but by the declaration that he was actually standing among them, although they knew him not; and

on the following days he points out Jesus as that unknown Christ, adding, at the same time, an admission of his pre-existence as the divine Logos or Word.

If these two narratives refer to the same subject (and it is hard to believe that they do not), they are inconsistent. The crowds who accepted the teaching of John might readily in their enthusiasm look upon him as their expected deliverer. But the great council was composed of Pharisees and Sadducees; and to these John, we are told, had already given deep offence by calling them serpents and a generation of vipers. They would, therefore, in all likelihood have decided that he was neither Messiah nor Elias nor the prophet; and even if they admitted the lesser claim, they would present a more vehement resistance to the other. The reproaches addressed to them by Jesus are said invariably to increase their opposition. There is no evidence whatever that they received the stinging rebuke of the Baptist in any other spirit. Hence, if the council sent any deputies at all, their purpose must have been simply to put to him a question similar to that which they are described as afterwards putting to Jesus (Matt. xxi. 23). Instead of this, they are represented in the fourth Gospel as coming to John under the full persuasion that he really was the Messiah, as astonished on hearing him reply in the negative, and as then offering him the subordinate titles with an apparent desire that he should accept one or other of them.

Either, then, the council felt no opposition to John, or they did not put to him the questions which they are said to have put to him in the fourth Gospel. But they were opposed to him, if we are to give any regard to the Synoptic statements; and, therefore, this narrative is not historical. What the motives were which led to the framing of this story, it is in no way the duty of the historical critic to explain. It is possible that the writer, wishing to lay stress on the acceptance of John as a prophet by representing Jesus as referring his enemies to the testimony of the Baptist, desired to have for this testimony a magisterial sanction. Such a sanction would not be imparted by the mere

favour of the people; and hence the formal putting of the question by the deputed elders.

The rejection of this explanation, it must be again noted, cannot add to the trustworthiness of an inconsistent and improbable narrative.

§ 5. *The Incidents at the Baptism of Jesus.*

We have already (§ 3) been driven to the conclusion that even for the baptism of Jesus by John anything like genuine historical evidence fails us. A further comparison of the passages which relate the mission of the two disciples of John to Jesus with the first chapter of the fourth Gospel, has led to the conclusion that the Baptist did not see in Jesus the coming deliverer when first they met on the banks of Jordan. If John had indeed seen the Holy Spirit descending in bodily shape like a dove and abiding on him (John i. 32), if he had heard the voice from heaven which declared Jesus to be the beloved Son, it seems incredible that from that time forth his faith could ever be for an instant shaken. If, however, these incidents did not take place, and the narrative of the baptism be consequently unhistorical, the accounts of the birth and early years of Jesus become more than ever doubtful and suspicious. If the history of later events cannot be trusted, far less can credit be given to stories relating to an earlier time.

It follows, that if the angelic annunciation never occurred, and if Joseph and Mary had no marvels to tell to their child respecting his birth and his high mission, then Jesus could have no consciousness of his Messiahship during his earlier years; and in like manner, if Zacharias and Elisabeth had nothing special to tell their son as to the work of his life, John would have no knowledge of his own personal relations with the Messianic king. If it be so, then to Jesus John would be simply a teacher from whom he might learn much, and to John Jesus would be but an ordinary disciple, although, it may be, one raised greatly above himself in the standard of goodness.

On this hypothesis we can well understand that Jesus would be attracted by the preaching of John, and ask for baptism at his hands in expectation of the Messiah, even though he may have advanced afterwards to the conviction that he was himself that coming one. On any other supposition we have to face many difficulties. If we suppose, with Justin, that baptism (*i.e.* an anointing by Elias) was necessary to point out the unknown Messiah to his countrymen, and if the furtherance of this manifestation was, as the fourth Gospel affirms (i. 31), the very purpose of his mission as Baptist, then, in this case, John, far from showing any reluctance to baptize, would have been eager to perform the rite. If we suppose that Jesus, conscious of his Messiahship, approached the Baptist who was unconscious of it, how, it may be asked, could Jesus receive that rite as signifying his expectation of the future coming of Messiah, when he knew himself to be the Messiah then present? How, again, could he receive a baptism of repentance which was either preceded by confession of sins, or followed by addresses which assumed the need of repentance on the part of the recipient?

The incidents of the baptism introduce us to difficulties of another kind. The fourth Gospel asserts, as we have seen, that Jesus was not known to John until the latter saw the pre-determined sign—namely, the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and abiding on him. The first Gospel, which states that Jesus was recognised by John on the first meeting, adds that, as soon as Jesus ascended up from the Jordan after the baptism, the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted upon him, while a voice was heard announcing him as the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. But the wording of this passage does not absolutely determine whether the vision was seen, and the voice heard, by John as well as by Jesus, although it seems to indicate that both saw and heard. The same remark applies to the narrative in Mark (i. 10, 11). The third Gospel contains the more important and categorical statement (not of subjective visions, but of the objective facts), that the

heavens were opened and that the Holy Ghost descended like a dove, while a voice came announcing the beloved Son, and that these events happened in the presence of all the people (Luke iii. 21, 22). This statement must be taken in its strict literal meaning if the veracity of the Gospel narratives is to be maintained. Any attempt to explain it away by allegorical interpretations involves the admission that the narrative is not historically accurate; and it is their historical accuracy which is now on its trial. If one tale may be modified, or tampered with, or accommodated, so may any other; and the giving up of one is virtually the abandonment of all narratives of prodigious incidents without exception. Yet there are comparatively few to be found who will maintain that the heaven was cloven, as a mountain may be cloven; that the infinite and all-pervading Spirit came down in the likeness of a dove; and that sounds were heard from heaven in an articulate human dialect.

Speaking of these incidents, Dr. Milman says that 'this light could scarcely have been seen or the voice heard by more than the Baptist and the Son of Mary himself, as no immediate sensation appears to have been excited among the multitudes, such as must have followed this public and miraculous proclamation of his sacred character.' To this the only answer needed is, that the third evangelist speaks distinctly of the heavens being opened, of a Spirit descending, and of articulate words being uttered in the presence of all the people, and that, unless their eyes and ears were preternaturally closed, they must have seen visible phenomena and heard audible sounds. How, further, if none but John and Jesus were aware of the incidents, did the evangelist obtain his knowledge of them? This is a question which we may have to ask many times; and in each case the matter will be seen to be of supreme importance. But of a writer so truthful and candid as Dr. Milman, we may fairly ask why, if the sights were seen and the sounds heard only by Jesus and John, they should be vouchsafed at all. Being confined to them alone, they made, he admits, no impression on the minds of the people, and hence were of no use

to them whatever. To Jesus and to the Baptist they were, on any hypothesis, superfluous. They had, according to the third Gospel, been from the first conscious each of his respective mission.

Thus, in the accounts given of the baptism, as in those which have preceded them, we have narratives which are untrustworthy and unhistorical; and with this negative conclusion our proper task in relation to them is brought to an end. The growth of the legend may be accounted for, more or less satisfactorily; but even if our complete inability to account for it were demonstrated, the story would gain nothing in point of historical value. Nor is there much need to concern ourselves with the attempts of writers who seek to show that the less marvellous narrative of the fourth Gospel furnished the groundwork of the more developed thaumaturgy of the Synoptics. The statement itself may be questioned, and is, indeed, false; for in the fourth Gospel, as in the rest, the Spirit descends visibly like a dove, and the multiplication of wonders, when one wonder is introduced, does not alter the character of the tale.

It may, however, be noted that the idea of audible voices from heaven was familiar to Jewish tradition, and was readily adopted by the early Christians in conformity with the Messianic theories of the Jews; that the declaration at the baptism, which, in the report of Justin, is quoted precisely from the second Psalm, is addressed to Jesus in the second person, and would thus readily suggest the notion of a voice from heaven. Throughout the Old Testament writings, again, the Holy Spirit is denoted by phrases which suggest as readily the idea of a bird. In the opening sentences of Genesis, the Spirit of God broods upon the waters; and the idea being once suggested, the choice of a dove, as a sacred bird in the East, became inevitable. According to Rabbinical interpretations, the voice of the turtle was the voice of the Holy Spirit, and the dove from the Noachian ark announced that the submerged world had again become fit for human habitation. To complete the outline of the existing narrative, it remained only to provide a way for the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove;

and this was done by visibly cleaving the material vault of heaven, which had its windows and its doors. We may note, finally, that although the fourth Gospel does not expressly mention the voice from heaven, a divine speech, addressed to the Baptist, is not wanting (i. 33).

§ 6. *The Execution of John the Baptist.*

The narrative of the Baptist's death involves no thaumaturgy, while it is the closing scene in the life of a person undoubtedly historical. Here, then, it might have been supposed, we should have a real agreement in the several Gospels. Yet it is strange that even this event is attributed to two motives, which fairly exclude each other. The first Gospel (xiv. 5) distinctly states that Herod was anxious to put John to death, and was restrained only by fear of the people, who counted John as a prophet. In the second Gospel (vi. 19, 20) we are informed that Herod treated John with the greatest respect, asking his counsel and acting gladly according to his advice, while the hatred of John was confined to Herodias. It is true that in the first as well as in the third Gospel, the king is represented as sorry when he finds himself obliged to assent to the request urged by the daughter of Herodias. But, in Matthew, his sorrow must mean merely regret at the way in which he had been tricked into giving the order for his death, rather than sorrow for the sudden cutting short of his life. It is worthy of remark that the narrative of Josephus¹ makes not the slightest reference to the jealousy of Herodias, and ascribes the Baptist's death entirely to Herod's apprehension of danger which might arise from John's popularity. This expression (in spite of his pointed assertion that the baptism of John had no reference to confession of sins but was symbolical of purity already acquired), seems to indicate a conviction on the part of Josephus that Herod's fears were not unconnected with the Messianic ideas then prevalent. So great, we are told, was John's influence, that Herod thought it more prudent to anticipate all

¹ *Ant.* xviii. 5. 2.

dangers by putting him to death at once, rather than allow the evil to come to a head.

The dramatic character of the incidents which represent the daughter of Herodias as asking for the immediate presentation of the Baptist's head in a charger, can be explained only on the supposition that Herod was at that moment holding his court at the fortress of Machairous, in which John was confined; and as Josephus mentions that Herod was then at war with the Arabian king Aretas, the explanation may perhaps be correct. Otherwise two days at least must have passed before his head could be brought to Herod's usual residence at Tiberias.

Thus, in the narratives which relate the death of the Baptist, we have an undoubtedly historical event attributed to two entirely different causes; and if we conclude that the account of the first Gospel is nearest to the truth, we do so, not because it is found in a document which, like the other Gospels, is full of contradictions and impossibilities, but because it is substantially borne out by the history of Josephus. But this historical character extends to the relations between John and Jesus only so far as these are confined to the possibility or the likelihood that the latter received baptism at the hands of the former, and in this case was, for the time, reckoned among the number of his disciples. Thus far the picture of Jesus himself is colourless; but all that we have to do here is to note the fact.

CHAPTER III

THE TRYING OR TEMPTATION OF JESUS

THE Synoptic Gospels agree in saying that the trying or temptation of Jesus followed immediately upon his baptism. The fourth Gospel, as we shall see presently, excludes this incident altogether. But there are important differences in the Synoptic narratives of the facts. The second Gospel (i. 13) states that Jesus underwent the trial during the whole period of the forty days, adding a feature not found in the rest, viz., that he was with the wild beasts. It also represents the ministry of the heaven-sent messengers as extending over the forty days. The first Gospel asserts that the fast of forty days preceded the trying; for the tempter is represented as coming to make his first suggestion only when Jesus felt the hunger, which is described (Matt. iv. 2) as not felt till after the end of the forty days. This Gospel then proceeds to speak of three temptations: the first being an inducement to turn stones into bread, the second to throw himself down from the roof of the temple, the third to offer direct worship to the devil. The third Gospel asserts, in the words of the second, that the fast of forty days was occupied throughout by the temptations of Satan. But it agrees with the first Gospel in saying that the hunger began only at the end of the forty days, and then proceeds to give the three temptations of the first Gospel, reversing the order of the second and third. Thus the account of the third Gospel appears as if made up by combining the notices in the first and second; but if the narrative of Luke be regarded as an independent record, then

the three temptations in the first Gospel do not sum up the whole, nor are they the first in the series, but the last.

Without referring to the character of the incidents, we have here three narratives inconsistent in points of no slight significance; but the difficulties become insuperable when we compare the Synoptic Gospels with the fourth. This Gospel not only makes no mention of the temptation, it leaves no room for it. We have already noticed that the fourth Gospel does not state explicitly that Jesus received baptism at all. The whole scheme of this Gospel, setting forth Jesus as the Eternal Logos, led the writer to keep as far in the background as possible an incident which had once been regarded as marking the commencement of his Messiahship; and his expressions (i. 28-33) seem designed, accordingly, to lead the reader to suppose that, while John was baptizing on the banks of Jordan, he saw a preternatural light in the heaven, and witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove on the head of one in the multitude around him, and thus at once, for the first time, recognised the Master whose baptism of fire was to render superfluous his own baptism to repentance. It may perhaps be possible to insert the incident of the baptism between verses 28 and 29; but the notes of time leave it manifest that he wished to exclude the tale of the temptation from the cycle of Christian tradition. Otherwise we must suppose that he was unacquainted with it, a circumstance far from likely.

The order of events in the fourth Gospel is as follows; and it is of the utmost consequence to note it closely. The deputation from the priests and Levites from Jerusalem draws from the Baptist the assertion that the Messiah, at the moment of his speaking, stood among them, as yet unknown to himself as to them. On the next day after the deputation John points out Jesus as the suffering Messiah, or Lamb of God; and as he adds that he knew him to be so only by the evidence of heaven-sent tokens, it seems natural to suppose that he had seen these signs at some time subsequent to the return of the deputies from the Sanhedrim (*i.e.* within the last twenty-four hours). On the next day¹ John,

walking with two of his disciples, again points out Jesus as the Lamb of God; and the two disciples, leaving him, follow the Messiah. On the next day² (*i.e.* the third day after John's conference with the deputies), occurs the calling of Philip and Nathanael; and, in the first verse of the second chapter, we are told that on the third day (it would seem, three days after the call of Philip and Nathanael), there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee at which Jesus was present with his disciples. Thus, within a week after his baptism (if he underwent that ceremony), or, at all events, after John's announcement of Jesus as Messiah, Jesus is represented as surrounded by disciples in Galilee; whereas, in the Synoptic Gospels, he is undergoing his forty days' fast in the wilderness, having as yet not a single disciple.

Thus, without noticing the character of the incidents, and even if we allow the possibility of any or all of them, we reach the conclusion that either the narratives of the temptation or the accounts in the opening chapters of the fourth Gospel are unhistorical; and hence the task of the historical critic is, for these stories, at this point ended.

But these narratives involve difficulties of other kinds which may not be left unnoticed. Among these difficulties, that of the forty days' fast is one of the slightest. Still it is a difficulty that so long a fast could be endured without a feeling of hunger until its close, inasmuch as the human frame cannot for more than a very few days bear up under the total abstinence from food mentioned in the third Gospel (iv. 2). The crucial difficulty is the sensible appearance of the devil using the articulate language of men.

It may be worth while here to remark that the notion of a visible tempter, if it was ever brought before them, seems to have found little favour with the writers of the epistle to the Hebrews and the epistle which bears the name of James. The former states expressly (iv. 18) that Jesus was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Now, without entering into the psychology of human action, it will be admitted that men are not tempted by

¹ John i. 35.

² John i. 43.

visible devils putting direct suggestions to do certain specified acts; and that if this was the course of the trying of Jesus, it was, in all respects, unlike our own. But the epistle of James (i. 13), entering into the question philosophically, declares that men are tempted or tried only when they are drawn away of their own lust and enticed; for, from the expression that every one is tried when he is so drawn away, the inference is fairly warranted that none are tempted in any other way, and that thus temptations, or tryings, are not to be ascribed to any diabolical origin. If, then, Jesus was tempted in all points as we are (save only without being led into sin), and if human temptation follows, in all cases, the course described in the epistle of James (i. 13-15), then, on grounds furnished by writers in the New Testament Scriptures themselves, we are brought to the conclusion that the Synoptic narratives are not only unhistorical but impossible. The truer philosophy of the letter of James is itself evidence that the notion of a devil becomes, when the nature of human action is even approximately understood, as superfluous as the idea of angelic agencies to carry on the movements of the heavenly bodies, when the laws which regulate those movements have been ascertained.

The truth is, that, although in the earliest Christian age the Jewish mind was steeped in superstition,¹ it had perhaps not fully grasped the idea of an ubiquitous demon who was all but the equal of God himself. The idea had been received by them during their exile in Babylonia; and it was the fruit of Brahmanic mythology and Zoroastrian dualism. In the earliest Vedic hymns, Indra, the god of the heaven, wages yearly a long conflict with the snake or dragon which shuts up the waters, and, striking him with his invincible spear (the lightning), lets loose the floods which are needed to supply the wants of men. But this dragon enemy, the Vritra, becomes on Zend soil the moral enemy of the Creator, or Principle of Good; and the conflict of Indra with his snaky foe is translated into the spiritual struggle between Ormuzd and Ahri-man, and still finds its expression in Christian symbolism in the

¹ See p. 134 *et seq.*

fight between Michael or George and the Dragon.¹ The comparatively late introduction of this idea becomes manifest on a comparison of passages which attribute certain temptations directly to God,² with other passages where the same temptations are ascribed to Satan.³ In the Book of Job the character of Satan is still very unformed. He is there still one of the messengers or angels of God, and appears from time to time before His throne.

The unhistorical nature of the narrative having been proved, we are in no way bound to examine the almost countless explanations by which commentators seek to soften down, or slur over, or evade the moral and psychological difficulties involved in it. Interpreters, who see in the story simply a tale of ordinary retirement, at the end of which Jesus is refreshed by mountain breezes, or by a passing caravan which supplies him with the food brought to him in the Gospels by heavenly messengers, must be left to exercise at their own pleasure their power of making anything out of anything. The same remark applies to critics who have maintained that 'what is called Christ's temptation is the excitement of his mind which was caused by the nascent consciousness of supernatural power.' It is enough to answer that the Gospels say nothing about any excitement, and that they give a series of incidents which are either historical, or not historical, but out of which we are not at liberty to frame something else to suit our own fancies. When such critics further assert that from the invitation of the devil urging Jesus to offer him direct adoration, we are to understand that 'he was tempted to do something which, on reflexion, appeared to him to be equivalent to an act of homage to the evil spirit,' we need only answer that, on this principle, we may, from the tale of Troy as given to us in our so-called Homeric poems, understand that the Trojan war bore the character and followed the course assigned to it by Thucydides.⁴

Dr. Milman evidently did not accept the narrative of the trying

¹ Bréal, *Hercule et Cacus*.

² 2 Sam. xxiv. 1 ; 1 Kings xxii. 23.

³ 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

⁴ i. 1-23. Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, Book i. ch. ix., 1870.

of Jesus as a record of facts which took place as they are said to have taken place. But he expressed, nevertheless, no distinct judgment of his own, and left the reader to choose between a number of alternatives. Thus, when he said that, 'according to the common literal interpretation,' the temptation was 'actually urged by the principle of evil in his own proper person,' we certainly cannot impute to Dr. Milman himself the belief that there is a Principle of Evil, and that this Principle has a visible body; but we do seem to learn on his authority the fact that the majority of Christians are dualists, or believers in two Gods—one good, the other evil. It is of the essence of monotheism to hold that there can be no *ἀρχή*, or principle, but God; and if any other originating power be granted, there is no escape from the dualism of Zoroaster. So far, however, as he may be said to express any opinion, Dean Milman inclined to side with those who think that, 'even in the New Testament, much allowance is to be made for the allegoric character of Oriental narrative,' and that 'some, not less real, though less preternatural, transaction is related, either from some secret motive, or according to the genius of Eastern narrative, in this figurative style.'

Of these plausible theories, Dr. Milman condescended to examine that one which saw in the tempter not Satan but the high priest, or one of the Sanhedrim, deputed by the council for the purpose of discovering the real pretensions of Jesus. This person (so the theory would have it) followed Jesus into the wilderness, and demanded, as the price of his acknowledgement by the public authorities, some display of preternatural powers corresponding to those ascribed to Moses. In reply to this view, daringly impertinent as it is, Dean Milman urged the improbability that, at so early a period in his career, Jesus would be thought of so much importance by the ruling powers, or that, even if the writer of the first Gospel had some motive for wrapping up such a transaction under a veil of allegory, this motive could have any weight with the writer of the third Gospel; 'nor,' he adds, 'does it appear easily reconcileable with the cautious distance at which

the authorities appear to have watched the conduct of Jesus, thus, as it were, at once to have committed themselves, and almost placed themselves within his power.' We may, however, note that when, in the raising of Lazarus, Jesus performed a work immeasurably beyond any ascribed to Moses, it led the authorities only to resolve on putting the worker of the wonder to death. But, in truth, if the faintest memory of the incidents attending the nativity of Jesus had survived—if they had remembered anything of the star and the coming of the Magi, of the murdering of the innocents, of the angelic song in the sky over Bethlehem—still more, if they had thought of the Galilæan child who astonished them in the temple with his understanding and answers—they could have been in no doubt either as to his character or to his claims; and thus the deputation to John and to Jesus become alike superfluous. Further, it must be admitted that the ruling powers seem to have cared very little for extraordinary manifestations; and it is scarcely likely that men even moderately well read in the Pentateuch could forget the caution there given¹ against workers of wonders which may be false, or that men who promised to follow Jesus on such grounds at the beginning of his ministry should reject him at its close for working a wonder, the reality of which they allowed.²

We need only touch on the difficulties involved in the transitions from the scene of one temptation to that of another. The Synoptic Gospels distinctly assert that the transitions were effected by the devil, who takes Jesus and places him on the temple roof and the mountain summit. It follows that he carried Jesus through the air; and this magical notion has, naturally, been disagreeable to many even who accept the idea of an incarnate devil.

Nor does the character of the suggestions made to Jesus call for any extended notice. If there be a certain natural force in the temptation addressed to hunger, there is none in the suggestion to fall from a pinnacle; while the inducement to pay worship to the devil would at once be rejected with horror by every true Israelite.

¹ Deut. xiii.

² John xi. 47.

How the narrative came into existence we are not in any way called on to explain. Our task was ended when the story was shown to be not historical. Still, it may be remarked, that such tryings as those of Abraham and Job might suggest the idea of temptation to be undergone by the Messiah, and that the wilderness was regarded as the special abode of evil spirits, like the Asmodeus (*Aeshma-daêva*) of the book of Tobit. In the wilderness, Moses was awakened to the consciousness of his high calling: in the wilderness, the Messiah should awaken to the consciousness of his far higher mission. The forty days' fast of Moses and Elijah may have fixed the time for the fast of Jesus; and a further precedent is furnished by the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, the dreary time during which the chosen people are said to have undergone their temptation. As hunger was the chief trial of the Israelites, so should hunger be the first temptation of the Messiah. As they were induced to tempt God in the desert, so should the Messiah be urged to tempt God by asking for preternatural rescue from self-incurred danger; and as the Israelites yielded to idolatry, so should the Messiah reject idolatry, which later Jewish notions regarded as identical with the worship of the devil. The same idea of temptation, or trying, at the beginning of their career, is seen in the legends of Bouddha, Herakles, and other mythical benefactors of mankind.

But if these suggestions be rejected as of no value, the narratives still remain devoid of all historical authority.

CHAPTER IV

DURATION OF THE MINISTRY

THE popular idea, sanctioned by some patristic writings, regards the public ministry of Jesus as extending over three years. How far such a notion may be warranted by facts will be seen on a comparison of the fourth Gospel with the Synoptic narratives.

In the latter, Jesus is represented as labouring altogether in Galilee from the time immediately succeeding the temptation to the period of the journey to Jerusalem which led to the crucifixion. In the former, Jesus is described as performing his chief works and delivering his principal discourses in Jerusalem, and as departing into Galilee only for some specified reasons. According to Matthew iv. 12, Jesus, having returned from Judæa into Galilee on hearing of the imprisonment of the Baptist, first went to Nazareth, which he immediately left for Capernaum. This city is thenceforth the centre from which he visits various parts of northern Palestine, but chiefly the region to the west of Jordan and the lake of Tiberias, which formed the province of Herod Antipas.

But neither from this Gospel, nor from those of Mark and Luke, are we able to determine the duration of the ministry. The expressions used would reasonably lead us to suppose that the evangelists imagined themselves to be drawing up a definite chronological narrative. But the notes of time given by them are generally confined to such phrases as 'then,' 'at that time,' 'after two days,' 'in those days,' and the like. On the hypothesis that Jesus regularly kept the Paschal feast at Jerusalem, his whole

public career, according to the Synoptics, would be limited to a period of less than twelve months, as only one passover is mentioned by them. If it was extended over a longer time, it would follow that Jesus was not a regular attendant at Jerusalem during the Paschal feast—a supposition not altogether disproved even by the fourth Gospel, for there is no explicit statement that Jesus himself attended the passover mentioned in John vi. 4. In either case it is obvious that the Synoptists were either ignorant of, or had forgotten, or took no interest in, the discourses and works which the fourth Gospel assigns to the several visits of Jesus to Jerusalem before the last passover. All these suppositions seem equally incredible. According to the fourth Gospel, Jesus was attended at each of the festivals by Galilæans who crowded to Jerusalem in great numbers; and it is not to be credited that they would carry away to Galilee no remembrance of such events as the cure of the man with the infirmity of nearly forty years' standing at the pool of Bethesda, or the restoration of the blind man to sight, or the raising of Lazarus—to none of which do the Synoptists make the slightest reference. Forgetfulness of such things presumes a grosser stupidity than we have a right to impute even to Galilæans; and if it be urged that a Galilæan writer would dwell chiefly on incidents likely to glorify his own country, the answer is, that the Synoptic Gospels are clearly designed to glorify not Galilee, but Jesus. He is the central figure on which the brightest light is shed throughout, while the cities of Galilee are frequently reprovèd with the utmost severity for their hardness of heart and unbelief.

In the fourth Gospel, Jesus, after his last interview with John, departs, not into the wilderness for the temptation, but to Cana of Galilee (ii. 1), and from thence to Capernaum (ii. 12). A few days later (ii. 13), he departs to Jerusalem for the passover, and after having spent some time in Judæa (iii. 22; iv. 1), he returns through Samaria into Galilee (iv. 43). Nothing is recorded of his stay in this region at this time but the cure of the nobleman's son at Capernaum, after which he is summoned to Jerusalem for the

feast (whatever this was), which was marked by the wonder at the pool of Bethesda (v. 1). In the following chapter (vi. 1) it is stated that he went over the sea of Galilee, and remained for some time, chiefly at Capernaum (vi. 59), until he went up in secret to the feast of tabernacles (vii. 1). To this visit belong all the discourses which extend to chapter x. 21; and these are followed immediately (x. 22) by the mention of the feast of dedication, the inference being that Jesus had remained in the Holy City during the whole interval between the two feasts. After this, Jesus retires (x. 40) into Peræa, or the country beyond Jordan, where he remains down to the death of Lazarus and the beginning of the journey which immediately preceded the crucifixion.

Of all these events the Synoptics know nothing; and their ignorance presents a wholly insuperable difficulty. They are careful to note not only the time at which he returns to Galilee and that at which he leaves it, but the various excursions across the lake of Tiberias. It is incredible that they should have said nothing of the astonishing events attending his visits to Jerusalem, if they had been acquainted with them. If it be argued that the omission is accounted for by the fact that the discourses at Jerusalem required a far higher spiritual discernment than his discourses in Galilee, the answer is, that the former are far more miserably misunderstood than the latter, and that large portions of them are said to be addressed to enemies who seek to kill him. If, on the other hand, we take the silence of the Synoptics as an argument that these events never took place, it follows that the author of the fourth Gospel fabricated a series of the most astonishing events and discourses, which he has further assigned to a place not visited by Jesus till the close of his ministry.

A further contradiction becomes apparent, when we note that the Synoptic evangelists seem to be as anxious to state the reason for his leaving Galilee as the Johannine writer is to explain why he went away from Jerusalem. From the former, it seems clear that he would not have left Galilee if he could have avoided it. From the latter (vii. 1), we seem to learn not less plainly that he

would have remained at Jerusalem if he could have done so with safety. The two statements cannot both be true ; and the question arises whether we have any reason for preferring the one to the other.

If there be, it is not a reason of any great strength. If we take the Synoptic version, it is not easy to understand how one visit of two or three days to Jerusalem should stir up an antagonism so vehement as to lead to the capture and death of Jesus. If it be said that he was denounced by Scribes and Pharisees who were resident in the towns of Galilee, then it cannot be said that he absented himself from Jerusalem because in Galilee he was free from all such ecclesiastical supervision. The motive of prudence being thus taken away, there was no reason why he should not regularly go up to the temple for every feast.

But, though the Synoptists agree in making Galilee the scene of his ministry, they agree in little more. The first Gospel (iv. 14) takes him to Capernaum to fulfil a supposed prophecy of Isaiah. The third (iv. 16) represents him as first making an attempt to establish himself at 'his own city, Nazareth.' In the Synagogue on a Sabbath day he announces that another supposed Messianic prediction of Isaiah is fulfilled in his own person, and his fellow-townsmen marvel at hearing such words from the carpenter's son (iv. 22). On his quoting to them the proverb that prophets are without honour only in their own country, they are so enraged that they press on him, and hurry him to the brow of the hill on which their city is built, intending to hurl him down over it ; but by a mysterious restraining power Jesus withdraws himself from the midst of them and escapes.

A visit to Nazareth, which is evidently the same as the one just described, is found in the first and second Gospels in a very different connexion and at a much later time. It is true that no attempt is made to put him to death ; but Jesus quotes to them the same proverb in answer to the same expressions of disparagement or unbelief on their part (Matthew xiii. 57). Here also, as

in Mark (vi. 1-4), a pointed reference is made to mighty works wrought by Jesus, as well as to his wisdom, thus proving that the visit to Nazareth could not have occurred immediately after his return from Judæa into Galilee. This fact is incidentally betrayed by the narrative in the third Gospel (iv. 23), which, while it describes the visit as the first incident in the ministry of Jesus, represents him as telling the Nazarenes, 'Ye will surely say to me this parable, Physician, heal thyself. Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do here also in thy country.' By this reference to previous wonders wrought in Capernaum the evangelist summarily contradicts his own statement that the visit to Nazareth preceded any ministrations in Capernaum. If it be urged that the account in the third Gospel belongs to an earlier incident than that mentioned in the other Gospels, the answer is, that in this case the Nazarenes would have been quite well acquainted with his wisdom, and needed not to ask the same question and to receive the same reply a second time. The self-contradiction of the third evangelist shows the thoroughly unhistorical nature of the narrative.

The remaining incidents of the public life of Jesus are described with no greater accuracy. The same events and the same discourses are given in very different sequences, and ascribed to different places. Hence some, who have wished to uphold the credit of the Gospels as historical records, have urged that the idea of giving a correct chronological order of events was foreign to the minds of the Synoptists. It may be so; but this hypothesis makes it impossible for us to determine how and when the events took place, or whether they ever took place at all.

While, then, in these Gospels the ministry seems to be limited to a few months, in the fourth it is extended, apparently, to two years. But in truth, all the opinions held on this subject rest on a fanciful basis. Some, who regard the ministry as begun and ended within twelve months, have supposed that this period is indicated by 'the acceptable year of the Lord'; while Irenæus and others, who extended it to twenty years, relied on the expression, 'Thou

art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' as proving that he had passed the fourth and was approaching the end of the fifth decade of his life.

Finally, if we accept the statement of the third Gospel (iii. 1) that Jesus was baptized in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, it would follow that the ministry may have extended over seven years, for Pilate was recalled in the year of the emperor's death, and the reign of Tiberius lasted over twenty-two years. But we have already noted the chronological errors which render this passage historically worthless. Thus, then, we cannot profess to have any certain, or even moderately trustworthy, information either as to the duration of the ministry or as to the principal scenes of the labours of Jesus. What is seen clearly is that the Synoptic and Johannine narratives mutually exclude each other. This relative trustworthiness, or untrustworthiness, will be more apparent in the sequel.

CHAPTER V

THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

THE scanty and contradictory notes of time given for the several incidents in the ministry of Jesus as well as for its general duration render it impossible for us to do more than to take in the most convenient order events, almost all of which appear in the several Gospels in different sequences and relations.

By all the evangelists Jesus is represented as alone at the beginning of his ministry, and as being afterwards attended by a band of disciples. Here, however, the agreement ends. In the fourth Gospel, Jesus, twice seen by the Baptist walking alone,¹ is twice hailed by him as the Lamb of God, who lifts up or takes away the sins of the world. On the second of these two occasions the Baptist is attended by two of his disciples, who, on hearing their master's address, forsake him and follow Jesus (John i. 29-35). This statement at once throws us back on all the difficulties involved in the relations of the Baptist to Jesus.² If the former so clearly recognised his high Messianic character, if he saw in Jesus that mighty one who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire, it was eminently consistent with such a conviction that he should surrender his own disciples to the Christ; but it is inconsistent that he should retain any, or that he should continue

¹ According to John i. 29 there was no one to hear John's exclamation, unless Jesus was within hearing distance. How was the evangelist made acquainted with the fact? We shall come across other instances of the same difficulty in this Gospel, and, indeed, in the others also.

² See above, chapter ii. section 2.

any longer to administer his own rite of baptism. But he does continue to baptize, even in the fourth Gospel (iii. 23), while in the Synoptic Gospels he is described as not recognising the high spiritual character of Jesus; and he is spoken of accordingly as less than the least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xi. 11). We have also to remember that, if any credit be given to any part of the history of the Acts, there existed to a much later date a body of persons who knew no baptism but that of John, and who had not, so we are told, even heard of the existence of a Holy Ghost.¹ Hence this account of the transference of the Baptist's disciples must be set aside as unhistorical.

Of the two disciples thus transferred one is said to have been Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; the other, who is nameless, has been generally regarded as the favourite disciple who lay on Jesus' breast at the last evening meal,² and is further identified with John, the son of Zebedee. Thus, then, according to the fourth Gospel, Andrew, after abiding with Jesus for a single night, is convinced of his Messiahship, and thereupon summons his brother Simon, who is now brought before Jesus for the first time and receives from him the surname of Kephas, a stone (*petros*). Simon is, therefore, introduced to Jesus as the Messiah; and both brothers are as distinctly convinced of his mission as the Baptist is represented to have been. But in the Synoptic accounts none of the disciples for a long time rise to this conviction; and, when they do arrive at it, it is Peter who first puts it into words, and no hint is given that Andrew had long ago given utterance to the same belief.

On the next day, in the same story (John i. 43), Jesus gives his first distinct call; but this call is given to Philip, described as of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip is called on the road to Galilee, and, having found his brother Nathanael, brings him also to Jesus as the Messiah. It is scarcely necessary

¹ If any inference can be drawn from this statement, it would be that the words put into the mouth of the Baptist in Matt. iii. 11 are a fiction. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was of the essence of John's teaching, as given in our Gospels.

² *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 431.

to notice the opinion which in Nathanael sees the apostle Bartholomew. It is more to the purpose to note his incredulity when told that the Messiah belonged to Nazareth. There is not the slightest evidence that at this time any stigma attached to that city more than to any other in Galilee; and in the general contempt for the whole province of Galilee Nathanael, as being himself a Galilæan, was not very likely to concur.

But every incident in the narrative of this call is the gravest tax on our powers of belief. As Nathanael approaches, Jesus at once greets him as an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile; and when Nathanael expresses his surprise that Jesus should know him, the answer is, 'Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.' It would be folly to waste time on explanations which assert that Jesus had already been informed of the character of Nathanael, as the words of Jesus are thus degraded into a piece of gross trickery. It is indubitable that the writer meant to describe this knowledge as preternatural, and as such it is regarded by Nathanael. The idea that Jesus saw Nathanael reading the law under a fig-tree, and thus had a clue to his character, is scarcely less reprehensible. Hypocrites may read the law under fig-trees,¹ and a diligent student of Deuteronomy (xiii.) must have remembered the solemn warning against being led astray by any mere outward sign. Forgetting, however, all that is there said about wonders which may possibly be false, Nathanael without waiting, it would seem, for any moral proof, at once acknowledges Jesus as Son of God and king of Israel; and Jesus, without rebuking him for believing on the score of a mere sign, promises that he shall see greater tokens of his knowledge and power hereafter.

How this tradition (which must be dismissed as not belonging to the domain of history) grew up, we are not called upon to determine. It is barely possible that the groundwork may have

¹ It would suit the theology of the fourth Gospel to take the phrase *ὅρα ὕπὸ τῆς συκῆς*, i. 49, as=*in utero matris*. It may, therefore, have been, like the declaration in viii. 58, designed to express his pre-existence as the Logos.

been furnished by the second-sight attributed to Elisha, and, at his prayer, conferred on others ;¹ but the rejection of this explanation adds nothing to the trustworthiness of the Johannine narrative.

Thus, before the arrival of Jesus in Galilee, the fourth Gospel represents him as attended by five disciples—Andrew and his brother Simon, the nameless one who may be John, Philip, and Nathanael. But in the first Gospel (iv. 18) Jesus, walking alone, finds Andrew and Simon for the first time on the shore of the Galilæan sea, and, promising to make them fishers of men, bids them follow him. The call is instantly obeyed, and their fishermen's occupation forthwith abandoned. Going onwards, he summons in like manner James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who likewise leave their ships and their father at his command. Thus the places and the incidents of these calls are absolutely, and in every respect, contradictory.

Writers who have wished to reconcile these statements have generally taken refuge in the notion that the two evangelists describe separate calls many times repeated ; but this hypothesis does nothing more than substitute one difficulty for another. If it be supposed that the calls in the fourth Gospel succeeded those recorded in the Synoptics, then Andrew and John, having already followed Jesus, could not have been found afterwards among the disciples of the Baptist ; and if Peter had already been summoned to be a fisher of men, there would have been no need of his brother Andrew's telling him at a later time that they had found the Messiah. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the calls in the fourth Gospel preceded those of the Synoptic Gospels, it is not easy to see how Philip and the rest could have deserted Jesus after receiving his command to follow him. Wherever else this phrase is used, it is used as expressing an injunction which is to be rigidly complied with ; and it is construed by the disciples accordingly. 'Lo, we have left all and followed thee. . What shall we have therefore?' is not the exclamation of men who think that they may follow the Master for a day and then return to their

¹ 1 Kings v. 26, vi. 17.

former avocations. But even if we suppose that they could so leave him, is it possible to imagine that, in a few days or weeks, they could so have forgotten all that had passed as to need in Galilee a summons which was addressed to them evidently as to strangers? For, indeed, nothing is more clear than that the Synoptic writers intend to describe a first call in each given instance. Why, again, if Jesus had already given to Simon the surname of Kephas, or Peter, which marked his special rank among the apostles, should he afterwards invite him to become with other disciples a fisher of men?

We cannot, then, suppose that the Synoptic calls preceded those of the Johannine Gospel, or that the latter went before the former. Hence, unless we have some special warrant for regarding either of the two as more trustworthy than the other, we must reject both as unhistorical.

It may fairly be remarked, in the first place, that the knowledge of the character of men displayed by Jesus at the first glance is scarcely consistent with the idea of any human consciousness;¹ nor can the instant obedience of those who are called be accounted for on any other hypothesis than that of a preternatural constraining force in the voice and bearing of Jesus. According to the narrative, they had not seen, and perhaps never heard, of him before. In any case, as Jesus was alone, he was unannounced; and if they had heard of him, it implied a divining power on their part to connect what they had heard with the stranger then present before them.

Here, again, although we are in no way bound to explain the

¹ We have no definite declarations on this subject in the fourth Gospel. The passage John ii. 25-27 seems to have been strangely wrested from its apparent meaning. All that is said here is that Jesus did not trust himself to the multitudes, because they all knew him (as the famed wonder-worker), and because they (his enemies) had no need that any one should bear witness about the man (i.e. Jesus), as he was himself so well known. This interpretation involves a change in the text to the extent of one minute stroke. We must read εἰχον for εἶχον. In the last clause, which yields no sense, we have no warrant for rendering ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ by *in man*. The passage seems to connect itself with John ix. 22.

origin of these or any other traditions, we may perhaps, not unreasonably, refer to the Old Testament legends about Elisha. Whether, after the traditionary fashion, we choose to call them types or give them any other name, still the fact remains that in both we have incidents of precisely the same kind. Ploughing, in the case of Elisha, answers to the fisherman's craft in that of Peter and the sons of Zebedee; and the voice of Elijah summons the son of Shaphat to a high spiritual office with a power as irresistible as that of Jesus. In one respect only they differ: Elijah suffers his new disciple to go and bid farewell to those in his father's house. It was necessary to find some point on which the Messiah should rise above the prophet; and that point was found here.

But, further, if the Johannine account of the calling of Andrew and Nathanael be true, then all those narratives in the Synoptic Gospels which represent the disciples as unaware of the Messianic mission of Jesus, and as utterly unable to comprehend its nature, are convicted of falsehood. According to the former, the disciples, together with the Baptist, understood it as clearly as ever it was understood by the apostle Paul; and it is impossible to believe that a faith so clear could become so clouded and dull as that of the apostles is represented to have been during the whole of the ministry.

In the case of Peter, we find not only the summons in the fourth Gospel by Andrew who distinctly tells him that Jesus is the Messiah, and the call in Matthew (iv. 19), but also another call in Luke (v. 1-11), which is either another account of the incident recorded in the first Gospel, or a wholly different story. If it be the former, then all that can be said is that any event may be identified with any other. In the first Gospel, Jesus simply walks by the sea, and, bidding Peter and his brother follow him, is instantly obeyed. In Luke he bids them push out into the sea, and, sitting down in the boat, he teaches the people who stand on the shore. In the former there is a bare command; in the latter there is a marvellous draught of fishes. If, however,

we regard it as a separate incident, we at once find ourselves at a loss to determine where it is to be placed. It cannot come before the call in the fourth Gospel, because that occurs in Judæa, while that of Luke belongs to the shore of Gennesareth, even if we make nothing of the difficulty arising from the circumstance that any subsequent calls should be needed by one who had been distinctly informed of his Messiahship. It cannot be placed before that of Matthew, because, if by the wonder Peter had been so convinced of his own sinfulness and of the holiness of Jesus, a second call would have been quite unnecessary. If it be placed later, then we have before us this phenomenon, that a disciple who had received such a call as that described in John i., deliberately leaves his Master; that, having been called again in Galilee, he again leaves him, and is finally induced the third time by an outward manifestation of power to attach himself permanently to Jesus. There remains, also, the difficulty that each time he is invited as an utter stranger. Nor is the difficulty lessened, if we suppose that the healing of Peter's wife's mother preceded this wonderful draught, as it is said to have done in Luke (iv. 38), for this would only show still more how little Peter would be influenced by the signs and wonders. In the first Gospel (viii. 14) this healing is recorded in a later connexion. Thus, then, in place of an advance from a lower faith to a higher we have a very singular retrogression.

If, then, these narratives exclude each other, is either to be preferred? Are we to suppose that the tale of the wonderful draught of fishes has dropped out of the account of Matthew or Mark, and that the promise that they should become fishers of men (which is common to all the accounts) was in the third Gospel worked out into a literal history? As to which would be the more natural and likely course there can be no doubt whatever. Popular tradition never spiritualises; and all ecclesiastical history is full of marvellous stories which have had some metaphorical or figurative saying as their basis.¹ When a mediæval saint,

¹ See Appendix A.

pointing to his crucifix, said that it was thence he derived all his inspiration, the saying soon grew into the tale that he had a speaking crucifix; but the legend would never have resolved itself into the symbolical phrase. Here, also, we must call to mind the draught of fishes mentioned in the last chapter of the fourth Gospel. This narrative is regarded by Origen and other writers as a piece of symbolism, indicating by the definite number of the fishes and the soundness of the net the Church triumphant in heaven; while the great multitude breaking the net in the third Gospel represents the imperfection caused by the mingling of good and bad, of tares and wheat, in the Church militant on earth.

We have, therefore, no warrant for regarding the narratives of the calling of Peter, given in the third Gospel, as historical.

On the calling of Matthew a few words may suffice. In the first Gospel (ix. 9) it is stated that, some time after the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, having called Matthew from the receipt of custom, was immediately followed by the publican and entertained in his house. In Mark (ii. 13) we are told that after the healing of the palsied man in Capernaum, Jesus called Levi, the son of Alphæus, from the receipt of custom, the remainder of the narrative being the same. In Luke v. 27 we have the same name Levi; but the incident is placed before the Sermon on the Mount or Plain. That, in all three instances, we have the same tale, we cannot well doubt; but it is far from certain that the same person is denoted by the names Levi and Matthew. The lists of apostles in the second and third Gospels contain the name of Matthew; but they do not call him a publican, nor do they mention that he also bore the name of Levi. All that we can say, then, is that we have here the calling of two publicans, which is paralleled by the story of Zacchæus, who likewise obeys instantly the call of Jesus, and makes him a feast in his house, exciting similar murmurs among the orthodox Pharisees.

We have thus before us the callings of six of that band of twelve who received the name of apostles or missionaries. That

the choice of this number had reference to the ordinary Messianic ideas is expressly asserted in writings as ancient as the epistle of Barnabas. But the relation in which the twelve stand to each other is not the same in all the Gospels. All three catalogues place the name of Peter first; and this can scarcely be the result of chance, or because he was first called, since in the fourth Gospel he is called after Andrew and the nameless apostle who is supposed to be John. Throughout the Synoptics, also, Peter is always the most prominent, and is the first to acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus,—a statement quite irreconcilable, as we have seen, with the fourth Gospel.

A fact far more noteworthy is, that in the Synoptics, not only does the name of James take precedence of that of John, but the order in which the three most intimate disciples are mentioned is always that of Peter, James, John. James, therefore, took precedence of his brother, as Peter stood higher than James. In the fourth Gospel the case is represented very differently. Peter, it is true, is still in a certain sense foremost, but it is only in a physical sense. Peter follows Jesus to the high priest's house; but he gains admission only through the influence of John. He is the first to run to the tomb; but John is the first to see and believe. Peter is the first to cast himself into the sea when, after the resurrection, Jesus appears to them on the shores of the lake of Tiberias; but John is the first to see that it is the Master (xxi. 7). In other ways also John is exalted. In the Synoptics no disciples are witnesses of the crucifixion; in the fourth Gospel the beloved disciple stands by the cross with the mother of Jesus. Peter, again, receives a command to feed the sheep; but it is preceded by the reproachful question, 'Lovest thou me?' while a promise is seemingly given to John that he shall continue on earth until the second coming of Messiah. But in this Gospel it must further be noticed that James has wholly disappeared. Not even his name is mentioned, nor is his calling specified in the passage which indicates that of the beloved disciple. No speech is put into his mouth throughout this Gospel. These singular

differences justify a doubt whether, by the beloved disciple, we are to understand John, the son of Zebedee; and still more whether this John is the writer of this Gospel. If he be, why does he thus studiously keep out of sight the brother who takes precedence of him in the Synoptic narratives?

It remains only to notice the mission of the seventy disciples, which is recorded in the third Gospel only. No notice is taken elsewhere of any results produced by them; and yet in Luke these results are spoken of as greater than any produced by the twelve. This circumstance not only throws doubt on the mission of the seventy as an historical fact, but seems to point to a purpose, lying at the root of the story, to exalt the seventy at the expense of the twelve. If the mission of the former be historical, it is strange that no other book of the New Testament writings should take the slightest notice of it. If it be not historical, what confidence can we place in writers who can thus construct events to suit their own objects? As to their number, the seventy may be compared with the seventy elders of Moses, the seventy translators of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the seventy members of the Sanhedrim.

CHAPTER VI

THE MESSIANIC MISSION OF JESUS

WE have seen that, according to the fourth Gospel, Jesus was at the very outset of his career recognised as the Messiah, and even as the divine Logos, or Word, of the Father. We have seen him recognised as such by the Baptist, by Andrew and his nameless fellow-disciple, by Peter and Nathanael; and the difficulties connected with this recognition have been examined already. But the question now presents itself, How did Jesus regard his mission, and did he always make use of the same language in speaking of it?

That he looked upon himself as Messiah we can neither affirm nor deny. He is said to have heard with approval the declaration that he was the Christ (Matt. xvi. 16); nor can we well suppose that the belief in his Messiahship could have been held by his disciples after his death, if during his lifetime he had never thought of inculcating it. The Synoptic Gospels also represent his baptism as accompanied by signs attesting his high mission; and without reverting now to the statements of the fourth Gospel, we may note that in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vii. 21) Jesus distinctly claims the character of Messiah as the judge of the world. But the historical value of this passage can be determined only by an examination of that discourse.

There is, however, a marked difference between the language put into the mouth of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and that which is ascribed to him throughout the whole of the fourth

Gospel. In the latter, he is everywhere the divine Logos who has taken up his tabernacle in the flesh, and who returns to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. In the former, the colours are more variable. Far from proclaiming himself (as he does to the woman of Samaria, to Nicodemus, and even to the hostile Jews at Jerusalem), he is more commonly represented as anxious to withhold this knowledge; nor can the blessing bestowed on Peter for recognising him as the Christ (accompanied as it is by a charge to keep the fact secret) be regarded as historical, if the narratives of the fourth Gospel are to be received as true. Nor can we well understand why he should seek, in the Synoptics, to ascertain by questions what the disciples thought of him, if, according to the fourth Gospel, he proclaimed even to his enemies that he had existed before Abraham was. Not a word is here said about keeping his declaration secret; and the very idea of any such caution is absurd.

If any conclusions can be drawn from the sentence with which Jesus is said to have commenced his ministry, the bidding, 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,' being identical with the announcement of the Baptist, would seem to point rather to the expectation of another than to the conviction that he was himself the Messiah. On the other hand, the frequent charges (in the Synoptics alone) to keep silence on the subject seem to indicate a consciousness of his Messianic character, over which, nevertheless, he wished to throw a veil, although he had spoken of himself as the judge of the world in the Sermon on the Mount. But, as we have already noted, of this wish for secrecy the fourth Gospel exhibits not the slightest trace; and its absence raises an insuperable difficulty, inasmuch as of two contradictory narratives both cannot possibly be true, although both may possibly or easily be false. There is, also, the further conclusion that, if the Synoptic representations be true, the Johannine history is, in the strictest sense of the word, a fabrication.

Nor can it be denied that from the Synoptic Gospels we cannot infer any consciousness of pre-existence on the part of Jesus.

This is found only in the fourth Gospel; but it is there prominent throughout—a necessary result of the Logos doctrine; and hence we have no historical warrant for holding that he expressed this conviction himself. The silence of the Synoptic writers on this subject some have sought to explain by asserting that the minds of ignorant Galileans were too dull to understand such truths if they should be set before them. The reply is, that the Jews, before whom they are propounded in the fourth Gospel, misunderstand them as thoroughly and persistently as it would be possible for any to do, and, indeed, are represented as being roused to fury by many of them.

The same contradictions are manifest when we seek to determine how far his ideas of Messiahship involved any political element. It is certain, if the Gospel stories be worthy of the least credit, that this element entered largely into the Messianic conceptions of his disciples to a time far later than that assigned to the crucifixion; and, therefore, that when he sent forth the twelve to preach in his name (or spirit), Jesus, according to these Gospels, knew to what kind of hopes and longings they would assuredly give utterance. Nor is it easy to see how the promise (if it was made) of the twelve thrones (Matt. xix. 28) could be interpreted without some political bias by men in the mental condition attributed to the apostles. On the other hand, there is not the faintest evidence that Jesus ever sought to form a political party. What evidence there is tends strongly to prove that his purpose throughout was to show that his kingdom was not of this world.

But, although there is no reasonable doubt that Jesus looked to the employment of no earthly force for the establishment of his kingdom, he did look for a wholly new society on a regenerated earth; and his language respecting this new condition of things is quite consistent with the supposition that, far from desiring the subversion of what was known under the term 'the law and the prophets,' he anticipated the gathering of the whole Gentile world into the fold of Abraham. This expectation may, to some extent, explain the charge given to the twelve that, avoiding the way of

the Gentiles, they should go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This charge is given only in the first Gospel (x. 5), and naturally finds no place in the Gospel which exalted the seventy at the expense of the twelve. After the resurrection, indeed, Jesus is represented as bidding them go and teach all nations.¹ But, apart from the difficulties arising from the use at that time of the formula of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we have to reconcile with such a command the whole tone of thought which characterises the apostolic or missionary college in the Acts, as well as the whole history of that book.² If the very slightest dependence can be placed on any statements in it, it is clear that the idea of preaching to the Gentiles as such was among the furthest from their minds. When Cornelius is to be baptized, Peter is prepared not by being made to understand or remember the express injunctions of Jesus, but by a vision which shows him that he is not to call any man common or unclean (Acts x. 15). After the baptism has taken place, Peter justifies himself not by saying plainly (as, if he had received such a command, he must have said) that he was but obeying the last injunction of his Master, but by recounting his vision, and informing them of the spiritual gifts bestowed on the centurion and his family (xi. 5-18). Either, then, Jesus gave this command, and then the whole history of Cornelius in the Acts is false; or that history is true, and then these words of Jesus are unhistorical. There is no escape from the dilemma.

But the book of the Acts, which represents the apostles as averse to any intercourse with the Gentile world as such, exhibits a very different state of feeling on their part towards the Samaritans. On the persecution which is said to have followed the death of Stephen, Philip the deacon went, we are told, to the Samaritans; and the tidings that he had preached to them successfully, were received with so much gladness by the missionaries at Jerusalem, that Peter and John were at once sent down to

¹ Matt. xxviii. 19; Mark xvi. 15; Luke xxiv. 47.

² See Book I. chap. i.

confirm them in the faith. Hence, perhaps, it may be not unreasonably inferred, that towards the Samaritans Jesus had employed a different language from that in which he had spoken of the Gentiles. The statements of the Gospels do not enable us to determine this point with any certainty. On the one hand, we have the plain declaration to the woman of Samaria; but this cannot be accepted as historical until the authenticity of the conversation has first been proved. There is also the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the incident of the Samaritan who returned to give him thanks for his cure from leprosy (xvii. 13), as well as the command (Acts i. 8), to preach the gospel in Samaria. On the other hand, there is the charge to the twelve (but not to the seventy) that they were to avoid the villages of the Samaritans not less carefully than the way of the Gentiles. Either, then, some of these passages are unhistorical, or the later words of Jesus have a wider scope than those which he uttered in the earlier portions of his ministry.

CHAPTER VII

DISCOURSES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

§ 1. *The Sermons on the Mount and the Plain.*

IN the first Gospel (iv. 23) we are told that Jesus went about Galilee, teaching and healing, and then that, seeing the multitudes which followed him, he went up into the mountain and there preached the sermon which is contained in the fifth and the two following chapters. But whether this sermon was preached at the beginning of this circuit, or to what time it is to be assigned, we are not distinctly informed.

The sermon itself is manifestly a summary of the whole system which Jesus sought to establish. It enters fully into the relation of the so-called Mosaic economy to the dispensation now to be brought in; and it propounds a system of ethics which is of universal application, and which admits apparently of no exception. But with the theology or the morals of the sermon we are not for the present concerned. Our task is to determine whether it was spoken at the beginning of the first circuit, or whether it was ever spoken at all in the form in which it has come down to us.

It is a trite, yet scarcely superfluous, remark, that of this sermon not a word is to be found in the fourth Gospel, just as of the discourses in that Gospel the Synoptics exhibit no trace. Neither do we find it in Mark; but to this it may be answered that that Gospel scarcely takes notice of any of the discourses of Jesus. But in the third Gospel (vi. 20) there is a discourse which,

amidst many points of unlikeness, exhibits many more of such complete similarity that the two discourses may safely be identified. Both begin with beatitudes; both end with precisely the same similes; while the intervening portions in the third Gospel are little more than condensations of matter given at more length in the first. If the one is delivered on the mountain (whatever hill this may be), it is scarcely correct to say that the other was preached on a plain. The level place¹ on which Jesus stood may more reasonably mean a ledge or standing-place on a hill-side. In each case, also, after the discourse, Jesus goes to Capernaum, and there heals the centurion's servant.

All these circumstances can scarcely have occurred twice; nor is it likely that a teacher, propounding a new faith, would use precisely the same words many times. It may further be urged that the discourse could not in any case have been all given at one time, as the multitude of topics would bewilder any hearers, and would have made it wholly unintelligible to the ignorant crowds of Jews and Galilæans. Nor can it be said that the topics are throughout connected. If from the beginning of the fifth chapter to the nineteenth verse of the next chapter the links may be traced without much difficulty, there is, after this point, no reason why the subjects throughout the remainder of the sermon should be given in one order rather than in another. But the assertion that Jesus went up into the mountain before he began it, and came down at its close, shows that the evangelist himself regarded it as one consecutive speech. The idea that the sermon is a collection of fragments from many discourses is thus, so far as the evangelist is concerned, excluded; and if the discourse be one which could not be delivered at one time, the statement that it was so delivered must be set aside as unhistorical.

It is quite possible, however, that of the two reports one may be more trustworthy. If we assign this higher character to the sermon as given in the first Gospel, we can scarcely avoid the conclusion that the writer of the third Gospel has twisted many portions

¹ ἐπὶ τόπου πεδινού, Luke vi. 17.

and perverted the meaning to suit a purpose. For, whereas in Matthew the beatitudes refer wholly to spiritual conditions, to the poor in spirit, the meek-hearted, the hungerers after righteousness, the merciful, the pure, and the peacemakers, in the third they are eulogies on certain physical states, as temporal poverty and bodily hunger. To leave no doubt on the subject, some words are added which have no place in the sermon as given in the first Gospel, and which are directed against those who are rich in this world's goods, whose bodies are filled, who are merry and well spoken of. Of these opposite conditions the future life is represented as being a complete reversal. All this is in strict accordance with the Ebionite philosophy which reappears in a very glaring form in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and which lies at the root of both Eastern and Western monachism.

If, then, the woes in Luke vi. be not historical (and from their total absence in the first Gospel it seems impossible that they should be historical), they must be dismissed as deliberate fabrications. Whether the evangelist added the maledictions, because he thought that the Gospel, like the Law, should be sanctioned by curses as well as by blessings, is a question which we are not called upon to answer.

In the first Gospel the beatitudes are followed by a likening of all his hearers to the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In Luke (xiv. 34) the metaphor from salt is introduced in quite another connexion. In Mark (ix. 50) it is connected by a mere play upon words with the fire of hell. But such comparisons as these might be introduced at any time, and nothing can be built on their insertion in one place rather than another.

These comparisons are followed by the most important topic in the sermon—the relation, namely, of Jesus to the law. He here seems to speak professedly as the Messiah, as he does when he afterwards denounces the hypocrisy and vanity of addressing him as Master, without fulfilling his commands. But according to the first Gospel (xvi. 13) he had not declared himself Messiah down to a much later period. How, then, can he have spoken these words

at the beginning of his ministry? If he did, he could not then have asked his disciples at a later time whom they, or men in general, took him to be. If he asked the question, then this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is unhistorical or misplaced.

The following paragraph (v. 21-44) on the spirit in which the law is to be kept, as contrasted with the carnal interpretations of the doctors, is altogether wanting in the third Gospel, where the 27th and 29th verses of the sixth chapter clearly point to omissions.

These injunctions are followed by the promulgation of a prayer (Matt. vi. 9), commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, as a model after which his disciples were to frame their devotions. We here encounter a considerable difficulty. In Luke (xi. 1), long after the mission not only of the twelve, but also of the seventy, one of the disciples is represented as asking Jesus to teach them to pray, as John had taught his disciples. In reply Jesus gives them the same form which he had recited in the Sermon on the Mount in the first Gospel. The incident is scarcely credible. That a teacher introducing a wholly new order of things should give to his disciples a model of prayer at the very commencement of his labours is perfectly natural; that he should continue to preach to them without thinking of the other duty, or without even praying with them until they ask him to do so, is in the highest degree improbable. If he had already taught them the prayer, could they by possibility have asked the question? or if they had utterly forgotten the fact, and imagined that he had never taught them any prayer, could he have done less than upbraid them for the shortness of their memory, if not for the coldness of their hearts? When in the fourth Gospel (xiv. 9) Philip is mentioned as saying, 'Master, show us the Father,' the terse reproof is, 'Hast thou been so long with me, and yet sayest thou, Show us the Father?'

Either, then, this prayer¹ formed no portion of the Sermon on the Mount, or in the third Gospel it is dislocated from its right connexion, and the request prefixed to it is a fabrication.

At this point the connected sequence of subjects ends; and the

¹ See p. 203, note ².

fact that some of the precepts which follow reappear elsewhere in a different connexion may, perhaps, tend to prove that they are fragments of the teaching of Jesus, which floated about on the surface of tradition. Thus the warnings on the subject of earthly and heavenly treasure (Matt. vi. 19-22) are found in the third Gospel in a discourse directed against temporal care. The passage which in Matthew (vii. 21) immediately precedes the closing comparisons, cannot, as we have seen, have been spoken at the beginning of the ministry, if the statement in chapter xvi. 13 be true, that at that date Jesus had not revealed himself as Messiah.

§ 2. *Addresses to the Twelve and the Seventy.*

If in several books, which profess to record the speeches or discourses of any given person, we find not only that speeches reported at great length in one are presented in a very mutilated form in another, but that portions of them are introduced into other discourses, or appended to incidents quite different from those to which they are attached elsewhere, we can only conclude that in some of these reports the sequence is unhistorical, while it is possible that it may be incorrect in all. That this remark applies to all the discourses and almost all the parables given in the Synoptic Gospels will appear on a brief examination of them.

The tenth chapter of the first Gospel contains the address of Jesus on sending forth the twelve to preach the advent of the divine kingdom. Of this address Luke (x. 1-12) gives a part, slightly modified to suit a purpose,¹ as the charge of Jesus to the seventy disciples. Of the rest, those sentences which are given in Matt. x. 26-33 reappear in Luke xii. 2-9 in a totally different connexion. Other portions, again, are found in the final discourses relating to the second advent (Matt. xxiv., etc.). Hence it is plain either that the arrangement in Luke is unhistorical, or that Matthew has gathered into a connected address utterances which were originally independent.

¹ See p. 249.

But there is no question that the evangelist intended to set forth the whole address as one, for in x. 5 we have the beginning of the charge, 'These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying,' etc., and in the first verse of the following chapter we have the announcement that when Jesus had made an end of commanding the twelve disciples he departed to teach elsewhere.

Yet although the verbal argument between the evangelists seems to indicate the identity of these addresses, there are differences between them, some of which have been already noticed. In the case of the twelve the mission is limited strictly to the Jews. The charge to the seventy is framed on the larger view which belongs to the third Gospel. The former also bids the twelve to raise the dead, a command not found elsewhere. The fact that we have no story of the raising of the physically dead by any disciple till after the period assigned to the ascension may indicate, however slightly, that all these commands were given in their true spiritual sense, and that the evangelists understood them in a concrete or material sense.¹ There are differences also in the directions given to the twelve for their conduct. In the first and third Gospels they are to have neither gold nor silver, staves nor shoes. In the second they may have the staves and sandals, but nothing more.

So, again, the reason given in Matthew ix. 37 for sending out the twelve is the reason given in Luke x. 2 for commissioning the seventy. But a difficulty arises in the warnings given of persecution and treachery. Both these missions, according to the Synoptics, were carried out happily; and the sentences which speak of these troubles belong to a later time. But in Luke (x. 21) it is distinctly stated that Jesus thanked God for revealing himself to babes, and not to the wise, when the seventy returned with joy, saying that the very devils had been subject to them in his name.²

¹ See Appendix A.

² We can scarcely fail to see that these two missions would in no way serve their purpose, if they were carried on for a few days or weeks only; and yet the chronological framework of the whole ministry is in the Synoptics comprised within the limits of a single year. See Book III. chap. iv.

The connexion of the words with the incident is eminently natural; but in Matthew (xi. 25) the same words occur without any apparent connexion whatever. Hence we might be tempted to assert the higher trustworthiness of the third Gospel in this respect, were it not that the mission of the seventy is, as we have noted, a subject involved in the gravest doubt. If there was no band of seventy commissioned, and if we cannot look on the address to the twelve as a consecutive discourse, we are thrown back on the conclusion that historical materials have been overlaid and perverted by oral tradition.

§ 3. *The Parables.*

Among the most remarkable utterances of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are the parables. They have clearly in every case one and the same object,—that, namely, of rousing minds hitherto quite unaccustomed to think, and of quickening natures hitherto in a state of great degradation. They are for the most part plain and forcible illustrations drawn from familiar objects of the outward world or from common incidents of every-day life. They are susceptible, therefore, of the readiest explanation, and they are calculated to suggest trains of thought which cannot fail to be of real benefit to all who are so exercised. There is no reason to doubt that such narratives occupied a prominent place in the teachings of the Master, and some at least of the parables may have come down to us much in the form in which he presented them. This circumstance, and the general character of the parabolic teaching, must be borne in mind, as throwing light on the character of the discourses contained in the fourth Gospel.

It remains to be seen whether all the parables may be regarded as thus coming from him, and whether all were spoken at the time and in the places to which they are severally assigned.

The first series of parables, seven in number, are contained in the thirteenth chapter of the first Gospel; and the evangelist

clearly means us to understand that they were delivered at the same time in immediate succession. There is, it is true, an interruption in order to explain the parable of the sower, and another interruption at the end of the fourth parable; and these points will be noticed presently. But the marks of time are distinct. In verse 1 Jesus sits down by the seaside; in *v.* 3 he begins to speak many things in parables; and in *v.* 53 we are told that when Jesus had finished these parables he departed thence. Hence we must suppose that all these parables were put forth in one morning. Is this likely, or even credible? The parables were addressed to hearers with the weakest spiritual and moral discernment, and the meaning of them has to be reached by their own reflexion. If this wholesome exertion were rendered superfluous by an immediate interpretation, the benefit of the process must be lessened or lost. It is clear, then, that this method of instruction must depend for success on the measure in which the mental food was doled out. The purpose of each parable was to propound one leading idea; and the minds of the uneducated are unable to take in with profit more than one idea at a time. How then are we to suppose that Jesus should put before such hearers as the Galilæans a number of images which could not fail to bewilder them, and from which they would in all likelihood turn away with indifference or aversion?

Now of these parables that of the sower and the seed is commonly taken as representing the various capacities of man for spiritual life and growth. Those of the wheat and tares, and of the net which gathered of every kind, denote the commingling of good and bad as well in societies as in individuals in the present condition of things, while by those of the mustard-seed and the leaven is shadowed forth the silent growth and final establishment of the divine kingdom. The treasure hid in a field and the goodly pearl indicate the priceless value of the gift of eternal life. Here, then, we have four distinct ideas, all having indeed a common centre, but so far divergent that a mind unfamiliar with all of these could not be expected to take in more

than one at once. That Jesus looked for nothing more seems to be amply proved by the interruptions to the discourse; and here the contradictions between the several Gospels begin. In the first Gospel (xiii. 10) the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to others in parables; and Jesus, giving them the reason, proffers further an explanation of that reason, for which they do not ask. In Mark (iv. 10) they request him to interpret the parable for their own benefit, and receive the very natural reproof that if they cannot discern the meaning themselves, other parables could scarcely be of much use to them.¹ In the first Gospel, again, the disciples ask him at once before the multitude, and the interpretation seems to be given to them aside. In Mark they reserve their inquiry till they are alone. But as Matthew professed to be giving a connected series of parables in a single discourse, it would not agree with his design to interrupt his narrative for comments at the end of the second parable. He, therefore, adds three, and not till then do the disciples ask him to interpret the second parable of the tares of the field. This interpretation is given not on the seashore, but in the house; and hence, as *v.* 53 represents all these parables as belonging to a single discourse, it is made to appear that the last three parables are spoken not to the multitudes but to the disciples, in opposition to the method which we are told (Matt. xiii. 34) was without exception adopted by Jesus. Nor is it easy to see why, instead of ascertaining whether the disciples understood the third and fourth parables, he should add three more to burden their memory and tax their powers of discernment.

We must, therefore, conclude that, whether Jesus presented these parables in this form, or whether he did not, the connexion in which they are given must be rejected as unhistorical. But it

¹ The natural inference seems to be that they were left to find out the meaning for themselves,—in other words, that he gave no explanation. Yet the interpretation is immediately added. Surely the general conclusion is that none of the explanations come from Jesus himself. Some of them clearly do not belong to the same age with the parable. On any showing, they were more needed for the multitudes who are said not to have received them.

assuredly cannot be said of all the parables that we have them now as Jesus uttered them. If we regard the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in the first Gospel as truly expressing the mind of Jesus, and if we take the whole sermon as embodying the general character of his teaching, the genuineness of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke (xvi. 19) becomes exceedingly questionable. Like the beatitudes in the third Gospel, the parable seems to have primarily a physical application, and is essentially Ebionite in its view. There is no hint that the rich man made a wrong use of his riches, or that Lazarus was a man of great piety. The offence of the former is his wealth; and the claim of the latter is grounded on his poverty. It is not suggested that the rich man, knowing that Lazarus lay at his gate, failed to succour him, for in this case the reply of Abraham would have been, 'Thou wouldst not go a little way to help him: how can I suffer him to go a long way to help thee?' So, again, if the rich man had taken too much of the good things of this life, he might have been told that he had so done; but the assertion is only that he had had these good things, and Lazarus evil things. Hence the positions are to be reversed in agreement with the woes pronounced upon the rich in Luke vi. 24. Whether this Ebionite view was held by Jesus himself it is not easy to determine. The general tenor of his teaching in the first Gospel would certainly seem to discountenance this idea; but there are other passages, like that of the camel going through the needle's eye,¹ which may appear to propound a doctrine not unlike it. A more definite conclusion cannot be reached without determining whether these passages are genuine; and for such a decision the materials are apparently not forthcoming.

But, again, there are parables, of which all the parts may have been uttered by Jesus, but in which portions have become

¹ It matters little in what sense we construe the words *τρομαλιᾶς ῥαφίδος*. If there was at Jerusalem a gate so called through which a camel could pass only without its load, the comparison is much to the purpose. If we take the words as denoting only a needle for ordinary use, the simile becomes a mere impossibility. The writer of Mark x. 25 clearly speaks of a place, not of an instrument.

dislocated, and into which images from other parables have been introduced, the result being sometimes an incongruous medley. Among these must be placed the parables of the talents as given in Matthew xxv. 14 and in Luke xix. 12. In both we have a master who goes away; but in the first Gospel we have simply a rich man who intrusts his servants with capital to be laid out at interest, while in the third it is a nobleman who goes away to receive a kingdom. In both cases there is a reckoning on his return; and in each case one servant is found unfaithful, the sequel peculiar to the third Gospel being the destruction of the subjects who would not have the nobleman to reign over them. The question naturally arises, Why should this sequel be rendered necessary by a parenthetical statement in Luke xix. 14 which has nothing to do with the leading idea of the parable? The differences manifest in the equal distribution of the money in Luke and in the unequal sums distributed in Matthew, are of very slight consequence; but it is more important to note that, if the writer gave to the parable in Luke the form in which it has come down to us, he would, after recording the meeting of the citizens, have intrusted to the servants not money but arms, and would in the end have connected the recompence of the servants with that of their enemies. This strange inconsistency, which cannot be attributed to the imagination of the evangelist, must be regarded as the result of oral transmission. The idea of the rebellious citizens must have belonged to another parable. This parable is at once restored, if we read verses 12, 14, 15, 27 of Luke xix. together; and we see that the tale belongs to the same class with the parable of the rebellious husbandmen in the vineyard.

A similar confusion is made manifest on a comparison of the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew xxii. 2 with the version given in Luke xiv. 16. In the former the guests who are bidden not only refuse to come, but maltreat and murder the servants who invite them. The king, therefore, sends his armies, destroys the murderers, and burns their city. He then sends his servants

to the highways and hedges, and gathers in both bad and good, until the wedding is filled with guests. Of these guests one is found without a wedding garment, and is cast forth, bound hand and foot, into the outer darkness. The version in Luke is far simpler. The guests all make excuses, and the host sends forth and brings in the poor, maimed, halt, and blind, none of those who were originally invited being allowed to taste of the supper. It can scarcely be doubted that, if this parable was ever spoken by Jesus, it was given in this form; but we are driven to ask, Whence comes the mention of personal violence, and its terrible punishment in the parable as given in the first Gospel? The servants appear not with any demand for tribute or taxes, but simply with an invitation to a banquet, while the language of the evangelist points to an insurrection. Now such an insurrection consequent on a claim for produce is found in the parable which in Matthew (xxi. 33) immediately precedes that of the marriage feast; and the writer, who had just spoken of the husbandmen who refused to yield up the fruits of the vineyard, carried on the same idea into the subsequent tale, and thus introduced an image which altogether disagrees with the main story. A further departure from the original narrative is seen in the incident of the wedding garment, for, if both the good and the bad were brought in, there was no reason for surprise that one of them should be unfitly clad. That it was the custom at that time to distribute marriage dresses or badges to all the guests cannot be proved; and further, the parable, having thus far pointed to the rejection of the Jews and the readiness of the Gentiles to share the feast spurned by others, passes thus by an abrupt transition to the separation of the worthy from the unworthy.

It is possible that this incident may belong to some lost parable which represented a king as inviting guests to his feast on the condition that they should provide themselves each with a proper dress, the failure to do so calling down on them a not undeserved punishment. But however this may be, the conclusion can scarcely be avoided that these parables have not

come down to us precisely as they were uttered by the Great Teacher.¹

§ 4. *Miscellaneous Discourses.*

The confusion of materials which characterises many of the parables is seen also in some of the miscellaneous discourses of Jesus as given in the Synoptic Gospels. Disputes for precedency among the disciples led Jesus, it is said, to put before them a little child as the model for their imitation in things spiritual. In the first Gospel (xviii. 3) the disciples are told that except they be humble as little children they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The injunction has a clear and obvious force; but it is not so easy to understand the transition in *v.* 5 to precepts not about imitating children, but about receiving them in the name (*i.e.* the spirit) of Jesus,—in other words, about the mode of behaving towards them. In Mark (ix. 33) and Luke (ix. 46) the precepts of Jesus become perfectly irrelevant. There is no connexion between disputes for precedence which are to be avoided by imitating little children, and injunctions as to the way in which the latter should be received. Jesus is thus made in the first Gospel to branch off suddenly from the main subject of his reproof, and in the second and third Gospels to forget it altogether between the moment of setting up the child and opening his lips to speak. There can be very little doubt that we have here a confusion caused by the evangelist's memory recalling those sentences in which Jesus had spoken of the reception which ought to be given to his disciples in his name.

The connexion with what follows (Matt. xvii. 7; Mark ix. 43) is, like many others in the Synoptic Gospels, purely verbal. The woes which precede are pronounced against those who scandalize or mislead little children: and these are followed by warnings not to allow our vices to scandalize or to mislead us. It is obvious that the only link between the two is the idea of misleading, and

¹ See Appendix C.

thus we have a mere verbal string on which topics with little or nothing in common may be strung together. Nor can it be said that they are strung together with much care, for in xviii. 10 the writer of the first Gospel recurs again to precepts concerning the little ones who are pure, humble, and guileless; and the reason for not offending them, given in the following verse, is that the Son of Man is come to seek and heal *that which was lost*. It is, however, scarcely necessary to multiply examples of similar confusions proving dislocation of text, for it is generally admitted that the evangelists are in the habit of weaving into connected discourses fragments which belong to distinct speeches. But the writer who will introduce such scattered fragments with the formula, 'Then Jesus said,' etc., and close with some such form as 'When Jesus had ended all these sayings, he departed thence,' cannot be regarded as a historian; nor can any of his statements be received without the most stringent scrutiny. Yet it may be added that another merely verbal connexion is seen between verses 14 and 15 of Matthew xviii. The former asserts that the Father wills none of the little ones to perish; the latter declares that we are to try to regain our offending brother by conciliatory means. The link is thus the verbal connexion between loss and gain.

The precepts regarding divorce and celibacy (Matt. xix. 3, 12) must be noticed here only in reference to the historical question whether the opinions of Jesus coincide with those of modern thought on the subject. That Jesus pronounced against all forms of divorce known at the time is denied by none; but many refuse to allow that his teaching had any leaven of Ebionite asceticism. In like manner it is asserted that the precepts of the apostle Paul on celibacy were designed to be only local and temporary, 'during the present troubles.' Yet the reason given for them is of universal application. The unmarried, he says (1 Cor. vii. 32), cares for the things of the Lord, while the married are taken up with the earthly desire of pleasing their spouses. A man who could so speak seems practically in accord with Bernard, Hildebrand, and Peter Damiani; nor is it much less uncertain that

Jesus approved the same asceticism, if we accept as genuine the declaration in the first Gospel (xix. 11, 12) that some only were fitted for celibate life, the natural inference being that for such it becomes a duty.

In Matthew (xxi. 23-27, xxii. 15-46) we have a series of controversial discourses with the Jews after the final entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. If there be any history at all in the Gospel records, these discourses may certainly be accepted as genuine, for they are in the closest accordance with the spirit and method of Hebrew didactics in that day. Of these, the third (the answer, namely, to the Sadducees respecting the woman who had seven husbands) exhibits Jesus as an interpreter of Scripture. The validity of the argument for life after death depends on the correctness of the meaning here given to the words 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' But whether valid or not, the argument is apparently not original. It is found in rabbinical discourses, for which this passage could not possibly have furnished the model.

The next controversy, relating to the interpretation of Psalm cx. 1 (Matt. xxii. 41), is worthy of note, historically, in two respects only. It looks like an enigma. Most probably it was neither meant nor understood as such. There is no doubt (if the passage be genuine) that Jesus regarded this Psalm as Messianic, and that (1) from it he inferred the higher character of the Messiah as being the lord of David rather than his son. But he may also (2) have been actuated by the wish to remove the notion that Messiah was to be the son of David after the flesh, and thus that he must belong to his lineage or be born at Bethlehem. The answer thus connects itself with the accounts of the nativity in the first and third Gospels; but it does so only to weaken their testimony by silently countenancing the assertion that Jesus was born at Nazareth, and thus casting aside the earlier stories as superfluous, and so as worthless.

In Matthew xxii. 34 we are told that the defeat of the Sadducees provoked the Pharisees in their turn to try Jesus with

some subtle question. This statement implies a friendly feeling between the two sects, for men are not prone to avenge the defeats of their adversaries. But if the history of the Acts be in any degree trustworthy, the enmity between them was so great that Paul had only to declare himself a Pharisee in order to produce a complete schism in the ranks of his accusers.¹ If the account in the Gospel be true, the attempt of Paul would have failed; but if his attempt was historical and successful, then it would seem that this statement in the first Gospel must be set aside as unhistorical.

A comparison of the great anti-Pharisaic discourse in Matthew (xxiii.) with the other Synoptics involves more serious difficulties. In the former it is given as one continuous speech; in Mark (xii. 38) a mere fragment is given as a reproof of the Scribes. In Luke (xxii. 46) the same isolated sentences occur in the same connexion; but it is important to note that some of the most vehement rebukes contained in Matthew are given by Luke in the form of reproofs uttered at feasts to which Jesus had been invited in the house of a Pharisee. The host's wonder (Luke xi. 38) that his guests should sit down to meat without washing calls forth the stern reply that though Pharisees may be outwardly clean, they were inwardly full of all wickedness and impurity. This rebuke rouses, it is said, the anger of the lawyers; and the evangelist, forgetting apparently the cause of the gathering, describes the sequel as a scene of mere tumult. The rebukes given at the next feast recorded in Luke (xiv.) are far more mild, and are indeed of a character which might under certain circumstances be uttered by a venerated guest without causing any deep offence. It must be noted that these invitations to feasts in the houses of Pharisees are found only in the third Gospel.

The question now arises, Is the discourse, as given in the first Gospel, to be regarded as historical? In other words, are we to suppose that it was spoken continuously in the presence of the multitude after the final entry of Jesus into the city? Or are we to believe that some of the severest portions of it had been uttered

¹ Acts xxiii. 6.

in the houses of Pharisees in Galilee? or that here, as elsewhere, the evangelist has strung together into one address sentences, some of which are found isolated in other Gospels? The character of discourses in the first Gospel already examined furnishes a good warrant for answering the last question in the affirmative; but if so, the statement that this discourse was spoken before the multitude must be rejected as untrue.

But was any part of it spoken in the house and at the table of a Pharisee who was the host of Jesus? It is incredible (it has been felt to be incredible even by the most conservative apologists) that Jesus, on being asked by his entertainer why he had not washed before sitting down to meat, should instantly charge him and the whole body of the Pharisees with ravening and uncleanness, should call them fools, hypocrites, murderers of the prophets whose sepulchres they garnished, and as guilty of the blood of all the martyrs from Abel down to Zacharias. It is perfectly possible that all and each of these reproofs were thoroughly deserved, and quite possible also that Jesus may have uttered every one of them; but it is impossible that he could have uttered them at the place and time to which they are assigned here.

But if for a moment we suppose that they were so uttered, the statement with which the eleventh chapter of the third Gospel ends becomes quite superfluous. There was no need to watch and wait for words which might justify an accusation. He had already said more than enough; and it is incredible that a body of men, holding the highest rank in Jewish society, should allow such language to be personally addressed to them, and then should allow Jesus to repeat the whole, with additions, before the multitude in Jerusalem.

Hence the accounts in the third Gospel must be regarded as unhistorical; and it becomes therefore far more probable that these denunciations were not uttered until Jesus had entered Jerusalem for the last time, and that in this instance the account of Matthew is more nearly historical. But it is the penalty paid by writers who are convicted of inaccuracy, misrepresentation, and

credulity, that they cannot be trusted even where their narrative appears to be correct.

Of the reference to the murder of Zacharias, the son of Barachias, we need say little. If we insist on attributing to Jesus these precise words, we must understand him to be referring to an event which did not take place until nearly twenty years after the time assigned to the crucifixion. But it may reasonably be urged that the evangelist, compiling after the fall of Jerusalem, confused Zacharias, son of Barachias, with the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah, and that Jesus, if he ever spoke any such words as these, was referring probably to the violent end which in Jeremiah (xxvi. 23) is stated to have befallen the prophet Urijah, the son of Shemaiah.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JOHANNINE DISCOURSES OF JESUS

§ 1. *General Character of the Johannine Discourses.*

ACCORDING to the picture given in the Synoptic Gospels, the teaching of Jesus may be said to be characterised by a constant consideration for the intellectual as well as the moral and spiritual condition of his hearers. We find in it for the most part no play upon words, no abrupt transitions founded on a subtle and hidden connexion of ideas, nothing irritating; and if we do come across passages which seem to exhibit these faults, we have also, perhaps in every instance, found the strongest reason for assigning them to the confusion and forgetfulness, the misunderstanding and misinterpretation, of the evangelists. But, generally, we have from the Jesus of the Synoptics the language of one who seeks, not to excite angry feeling or astonishment, but by line on line, by precept on precept, here a little and there a little, to waken men of dull minds and cold hearts to a consciousness of their spiritual faculties and duties. In short, his hearers might well feel and gladly acknowledge that they were listening to one who had the words of eternal life.

To this teaching the discourses in the fourth Gospel present a marvellous contrast. There is comparatively little in the Sermon on the Mount which the least instructed Galilæan should find any special difficulty in understanding: there is scarcely a step in the Johannine argument which is not calculated to irritate and baffle even a well-skilled dialectician. There is no trace in the Synoptics

of any attempt to confound his hearers or to convict them of folly: there is not one discourse in the fourth Gospel which is not designed to glorify Jesus by exhibiting those who converse with him as wholly unable to apprehend his high spiritual meaning. Indeed, the special characteristic of these discourses is, that words intended to convey a recondite spiritual truth are in every case carnally interpreted, and the misunderstanding so created is immediately—and it would seem purposely—heightened by utterances rising in mystery; the end being, in the case of all the discourses addressed to the Jews, severe denunciations on the one side, and loud defiance with attempts at violence on the other.

Historically, this contrast is of the utmost importance. Is it possible that two modes of teaching so utterly antagonistic should characterise the same teacher? Is it possible, also, that one who had put forth in the Sermon on the Mount a seemingly complete summary of his faith, and a complete code of moral practice, should, in that Sermon, make not the slightest reference to any of those great topics which form the burden of the Johannine discourses? To these questions the reply ordinarily furnished is (1) that the Synoptic evangelists were incapable of appreciating or recollecting the higher teaching which fastened itself on the memory of John the son of Zebedee; and (2) that the persons to whom the Johannine discourses were addressed were better fitted to follow his meaning than were the rude and untaught peasantry of Galilee. Both pleas are absurdly inconclusive. (1) The former passes a strange judgement on the disciples, and drives us to the conclusion that, among all the hearers of Jesus, there was only one who could attach the faintest meaning to that portion of his teaching which, as set forth in the Johannine Gospel, was of nothing less than paramount and supreme importance. It is, indeed, quite possible that among the hearers of a great teacher or an eloquent orator there may be some who will follow him more fully and give shape to the highest elements in his teaching; but it would probably be impossible to produce a single instance in which the reports even from men of the duller sort would lead us to suppose that the

higher element never existed. Xenophon was a man intellectually by no means the equal of Plato, and for this reason it is supposed that his account of Socrates is more historical than that of Plato; but even from the narrative of Xenophon we should be quite prepared to say that there could be, and that there must have been, a more abstruse and metaphysical side to the teaching of Socrates. But from the Synoptic Gospels we should never be led to expect the mysterious doctrines which form, almost exclusively, the topics of the fourth Gospel. We have in the former no elaborate discourses about the Eternal Logos, the new birth, the eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood of Jesus the healer, no declarations about the oneness of the Son with the Father in a sense which may not be predicated of faithful men. While these doctrines are absent from the former, it is singular that they should closely correspond with the philosophy which, before the lifetime of Jesus, had sprung up on the soil of Alexandria. It is also singular that the evangelist, who thus exhibits Jesus in an aspect unknown to the others, should also assign to him words and actions, of most of which the rest have seemingly never so much as heard.

But further (2) it is impossible to allow the second plea, which rests on the intellectual superiority of the Jews of Jerusalem to Galilæans, for the very simple reason that it is nowhere manifest in the gospel. The rabbi Nicodemus is as dull and carnal as any of those who listened to Jesus on the shores of Tiberias, and the multitude of the Jews misunderstand him far more persistently than the Galilæans.

If, then, we conclude that Jesus did not employ both these modes of teaching, it follows that one of them must be rejected as unhistorical. Which of the two, then, are we to regard as really belonging to him? Surely not that of the fourth Gospel. To dwell on mystical doctrines is not the way to rouse the attention or enlist the sympathy of ordinary men; and without making an impression on these no new religion was ever established. But the general teaching of the Synoptic Gospels is pre-eminently that of one who is fitted to be a guide of men, who is sure to win

their devotion, and sure to be understood and obeyed by them. If, then, such was his teaching, then the great body of the fourth Gospel must be set down as a fabrication, with some slight basis, possibly, of historical truth, but in all its main characteristics a mere imaginary picture. .

§ 2. *The Conversation with the Woman of Samaria.*

The contrast between the Johannine and the Synoptic Gospels in reference to the teaching of Jesus is, indeed, an insuperable difficulty. But in addition to this we are confronted with the fact that the Johannine discourses are at issue with professedly historical statements in the other Gospels. Thus, in the conversation¹ with the woman of Samaria, Jesus declares himself distinctly to be the Messiah. The woman speaks of him as such to her fellow-townsmen; as such, the townsfolk invite him to tarry in their city; and, at the end of his two days' sojourn, they express their conviction, grounded now not on the saying of the woman but on their own knowledge of his words, that he was indeed 'the healer of the world, the anointed' (iv. 42). Thus the fact of his Messiahship was well known in Samaria from the beginning of his ministry. There is no attempt at concealment, no injunction of secrecy, no reason why the many who believed on him should not invite and bring many more to accept the same faith. But in his solemn charge to the twelve (Matt. x. 5) the apostles are specially commanded not to enter any Samaritan city, either because the Samaritans would certainly reject the proffered Gospel, or because they lay beyond the circle within which it was to be preached. But both these reasons are conclusively set aside by the Johannine narrative. The Samaritans do not reject the good tidings; and Jesus does not refuse to hold intercourse with them. Both these statements, therefore, cannot be historical, and one of them must be untrue. Whether the

¹ It is supposed to take place at Sychar; but this town is not known. See *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 423.

Synoptic account be trustworthy, is not so easily determined, owing to the number of passages, some of which describe Jesus as holding aloof from the Samaritans, while others represent him as kindly disposed towards them. Of these contradictions some notice has been taken already.¹

The abrupt transitions which mark all the Johannine discourses abound in the conversation with the woman of Samaria. To the request of Jesus for water, the woman replies by asking how he, a Jew, can address her at all; and the answer is, that if the woman had known what spiritual gifts he could bestow upon her, she would have asked and obtained from him living water. Here at once we have a method of discourse for which we shall search the other Gospels in vain. *There* Jesus would have said, much as the prophets of old had said before him, 'Come to the waters, every one of you that thirsts,' as he had bidden the weary and heavy-laden to come to him for rest. But here, as throughout the whole Gospel, his reply is misunderstood; and the woman construes his words as referring to water from the very well by which he was sitting, and asks him how, having nothing to draw with, he proposes to get at that water—her meaning being that water drawn by him would be different from water drawn by herself out of the same well—a notion savouring somewhat of magic. When Jesus has again spoken, she takes him to promise water from some other spring, which, once tasted, would render it unnecessary for her to drink again, and so save her the trouble of coming to the well to draw. To speak plainly, such stupidity as this is a gross absurdity.² Any one not an idiot would have known that the man who had tasted of water which rendered physical thirst impossible could never ask her to give him to drink, and must therefore have seen that he was speaking metaphorically. To her request Jesus answers by abruptly bidding her go and fetch her husband. Why was this command given? In order to bring her

¹ See pp. 253, 254.

² The evangelist had apparently forgotten that water is needed for other purposes besides that of quenching thirst, and that she would still have to come for the supply wanted for washing and cleansing.

to repentance and to confession of her guilt, as some have urged. But no confession is extorted, and the issue of the story is not her repentance but faith in Jesus as the Messiah. To the woman's reply that she had no husband, Jesus answers by informing her of matters which he must have learnt from others or which he knew of himself. The evangelist clearly means to exclude the former notion; and the latter supposition is incompatible with the idea of a human consciousness in Jesus. On being thus reminded of her past life, the woman, saying not a word in reference to her past acts, merely replies that she sees him to be a prophet, and puts to him a question on the old controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans. But that a woman of so poor a mental capacity, and (according to the story) such dubious moral character, should feel so deep an interest in this ancient and well-worn debate as to seize every opportunity for obtaining an answer, is, to say the least, very remarkable, and scarcely congruous. So much has this difficulty pressed on many interpreters that they have represented this answer as an effort to turn away the attention of Jesus from her own personal history to a more general subject. But inasmuch as, in the fourth Gospel, the answers of Jesus are addressed generally not so much to the actual words of a question as to the hidden meaning of the speaker, Jesus, refusing to be thus diverted, should have brought her back to the subject over which she wished to throw a veil. Such, however, was not in this instance the object of the evangelist. The discourse was framed to exhibit immediately the Messianic character of Jesus; and for this purpose the woman is made to ask a question concerning the place where worship should be offered to God, while Jesus replies by announcing the advent of a time when God should be worshipped in spirit and in truth without the trammels of local boundaries. To this announcement the woman replies, barely and bluntly, that Messiah is coming, and that when he comes he 'will tell us all things.' Here, again, if she had not been more than usually dull she would have felt either that Jesus had already told her all things (as she admits in *v.* 29) or that only one thing marred his

answer, this being the superiority still claimed for the Jews (*v.* 22). But it was necessary that she should name the Messiah, in order that Jesus might announce himself as such ; and thus the discourse is brought to the desired conclusion—a conclusion which, it must be remembered, according to the Synoptics, not one of the apostles reached until long afterwards, and which was never so clearly and explicitly forced upon them. If it be asked why Jesus should choose a woman with such a history as the recipient of such a communication, and why he should carry her mind into a distant future instead of fixing it on her own defects and sins, it is hard indeed to give an answer.¹

The same method pervades the sequel of the story. The disciples, coming to the well, marvel first that Jesus should be talking with a woman, and then beseech him to eat of the food which they had brought. Jesus replies that he has food to eat which they know not of ; and, precisely, like the woman who has just left them, they conclude that some one else has brought him meat during their absence. But if we suppose that this mode of teaching was habitual to Jesus, the disciples, in their familiar intercourse with him, must have been perfectly aware of the fact ; and they could not possibly have spent their time in daily and hourly misunderstanding his words unless they were far more dull and degraded than even the woman of Samaria. Their misconstruction is made to give occasion to a discourse on the harvest which the disciples were to reap on ground where he had sown the seed. These words may, of course, refer to the general developement of the divine kingdom ; but they may also refer, and with greater point, to those who believed on him in that city now and to the greater harvest which should be reaped in Samaria hereafter ; and thus these sentences seem to connect themselves directly with the narrative in Acts (*viii.* 5-14). It is not stated in the Synoptics that Jesus ever preached in Samaria ; but it suited well the plan

¹ It is not necessary to notice the interpretation which treats the woman and her five husbands symbolically, as on this hypothesis the whole narrative is at once taken out of the domain of history, and our inquiry is confined to that domain.

of the fourth Gospel to assert that he did, and so, if the evangelist had seen the book of the Acts, to represent the labours of Philip the deacon and the apostles as a reaping of the harvest which Jesus had sown during his ministry.

This examination has apparently divested the conversation with the Samaritan woman of all historical character. How the story was suggested or framed we are in no way called upon to inquire or to decide. It is possible that the groundwork may have been furnished by those striking narratives of the Old Testament writings with which the evangelist had been long familiar—those beautiful tales of Eliezer greeting Rebekah, and Jacob saluting Rachel by the well-side—the greetings being followed by the departure of Rebekah and Rachel, like that of the Samaritan woman, to summon their friends and kinsfolk. The suggestion may be taken for what it is worth; but its rejection leaves the narrative, as it was, throughout unhistorical.

§ 3. *The Conversation with Nicodemus.*

The conversation with Nicodemus is, in no respect, more trustworthy than that with the woman of Samaria. It occurs at even an earlier stage in the ministry; and in this, also, unless we are to suppose that the address to Nicodemus ends with the twelfth verse of the third chapter (and there is nothing to warrant any such conclusion), Jesus declares himself to be the Son of God given for the life of the world, who had come down from heaven, all who do not believe in him being condemned already.

Thus, then, in the first four chapters of this Gospel we have a knowledge of the Messiahship of Jesus, and of his eternal generation as the divine Logos, possessed by the Baptist, by Andrew and the nameless disciple, by Peter and Nathanael, by Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria with her fellow-townsmen, whereas, in the Synoptics, none attains to the fulness of this knowledge before the crucifixion, or, indeed, arrives at any consciousness of his Messiahship until a late period of his ministry. Of the knowledge of his

pre-existence as the Logos there is no sign in any part even of the Acts of the Apostles. The knowledge of the one and the ignorance of the other cannot be reconciled.

But, further, the writers of the Synoptic Gospels know nothing of Nicodemus. This is the more surprising, not only because Nicodemus is a rabbi of high reputation, and because, as a member of the Sanhedrim, he stands alone in seeking to get a fair hearing for Jesus (vii. 50), but because he shares with Joseph of Arimathea the task of preparing the body of Jesus for burial (xix. 39). The part taken by Joseph is well known to the first evangelist (xxvii. 57); nor is it easy to see how, if he had ever heard of the facts, he could have forgotten to mention that Nicodemus was, at the least, as zealous as Joseph.

At once, then, the unhistorical character of Nicodemus throws the gravest doubt on the genuineness of the conversation. How the idea of such a conversation was suggested we are in no way bound to explain. Possibly the statement (John xii. 42) that many among the chief rulers believed on Jesus may throw some light on it. The statement is itself unsupported, for there is nothing in the Acts of the Apostles to warrant the supposition that any of the higher classes among the Jews professed belief in Jesus. But if the evangelist once conceived the idea that they did, it became necessary to prove it. As their confession was not an open one, it must be presumed to have been made in secret, and as they could not venture to approach him in broad day, it was needful to come under cover of night. These suggestions may be worthless; but their rejection adds nothing to the historical trustworthiness of the narrative.

The conversation itself presents many difficulties similar to those involved in that with the Samaritan woman. Nicodemus is made (verse 4) to express his surprise at the need of a new birth for those who are to enter the kingdom of God. This is incredible in 'a master of Israel.' The rabbis were perfectly familiar with the phrase as denoting the conversion of heathen to the worship of Jehovah. To make the narrative harmonise with this fact,

Nicodemus should have been represented as expressing wonder, not at the idea of a new birth, but at the necessity of this new creation for an Israelite who regarded himself as possessed of an inalienable right to the divine kingdom. But, utterly forgetting the metaphorical sense of the words with which he was familiar, Nicodemus construes them as denoting the need of a physical new birth, with an absurdity even greater than any displayed by the misconstruction of the Samaritan woman. So, when Jesus heightens the mystery by a still more transcendental utterance, Nicodemus asks again, '*How* can these things be?' when, if he had been true to his Jewish knowledge and belief, he should have said, '*Why* must these things be? Why do you impose upon us that necessity of change which is needed only for those who are not within the circle of the covenant made with Abraham?' Thus, then, every answer of Jesus tends more and more to convict Nicodemus of stupidity and folly, and to glorify Jesus at the expense of his hearer. The method and purpose are alike wholly different from those which mark the Synoptic Gospels.

In answer to the last question of Nicodemus, Jesus, having told him that he cannot expect to understand heavenly things if he fails to apprehend earthly things, proceeds to declare to him the mode and purpose of his own death. The Son of Man, like the brazen serpent, is to be lifted up upon the cross for the healing of the world; and thus we have Jesus revealing to one who was not even among the number of his disciples knowledge which, according to the Synoptics, he did not impart to any of his missionaries until a much later period. Whether Nicodemus, who had misunderstood every word thus far addressed to him, would understand a reference to an event still future, is a question which we need scarcely ask; and the startling contrast between this method and that earnest simplicity which, for the most part, marks the teaching of Jesus in the other Gospels, renders further comment superfluous.

With the sixteenth verse all reference to Nicodemus ceases; and we are driven to ask whether Jesus could speak of himself to

others as the only begotten Son whom God gave in his love for the world, and as the light to which they come whose deeds do not belong to the kingdom of darkness. If he did so speak, it was next to impossible that any should understand him. If he did not, then we are reading an unhistorical tale.

Finally, the question must be asked, How came the evangelist to have any knowledge of the nature and the details of this conversation? All theories which would make out that, where human sources of information were lacking, the want was supplied by the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit, are wholly out of count. We are dealing with the canonical Gospels as historical records only; and it is as such that they must be judged. Apart from such theories, we have only the alleged fact that no one was present while Jesus talked with Nicodemus. No one probably will contend that Jesus drew up a report of it himself; and we have no warrant for the assertion that Nicodemus drew up such a report. Failing these sources of information, the only possible conclusion is that the conversation first took shape in the mind of the evangelist during the composition of the Gospel. This question will be forced upon us repeatedly as we go on in the scrutiny of the Johannine narrative.

§ 4. *The Discourse after the Cure at the Pool of Bethesda.*

The discourse delivered after the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda contains the defence of Jesus for working that cure on the Sabbath-day. Here, too, the arguments are entirely different from any employed in the Synoptic Gospels. In the latter they are all practical, and refer to the taking of animals to water or pulling them out of pits on the Sabbath-day, as well as to the eating of the shewbread by David. But in John v. 17, instead of these practical pleas we have a mystical argument based on the Divine Nature. The Father is unceasingly working in his creation; and the Eternal Son must, therefore, always be working also. This principle of Alexandrine metaphysics was familiar,

doubtless, to Philon; but we may fairly question if it would be appreciated by any of those who heard Jesus at Jerusalem. Here, then, as elsewhere in the fourth Gospel, the answer of Jesus is made to run immediately into a discussion on his own person and on his eternal relation to God the Father. The utter absence of such discussions from the other Gospels is a circumstance which must be accounted for, and which, if unexplained, destroys all claims of the Johannine Gospel to any historical authority.

We are here, also, brought face to face with the question of style and form of thought—a question of the most vital importance in dealing with such a subject as the present. Whoever may have been the author of the fourth Gospel, we know what his tone of thought and modes of expression were. No one will deny that the most prominent characteristic of the style of this writer is the pointing of contrasts. With laudable persistency or wearisome monotony he dwells on the opposite ideas of light and darkness, of life and death, of him who is from above and those who are from beneath, of flesh and spirit, of living bread and the meat that perishes. And the point is this, that not only Jesus but John the Baptist draw the same contrasts, and use precisely the same modes of expression. How is so astonishing a phenomenon to be accounted for? All the ideas just noted belong indisputably to Alexandrine Hellenism; and it is not pretended that this philosophy owes its origin or its principles to this teaching of Jesus. Hence it follows that, if the fourth Gospel be historical, both the Baptist and Jesus did not speak as they are said to have spoken in the other Gospels; and, further, that if they did not, then the accounts of the Synoptics are fictitious. But this it is impossible to admit for reasons in part already given;¹ and it is needless to add to them, for we have to deal with the further difficulty that, if the Johannine version be correct, the Baptist modelled his style on that of Jesus, or Jesus on that of the Baptist, while the evangelist imitated both. But it is impossible that the Baptist could have copied Jesus, for he is represented as his forerunner, and as having in

¹ See p. 123.

great part completed his ministry before the baptism of Jesus. If, again, the evangelist copied Jesus, he is convicted of great want of originality; but such a charge cannot be brought against one who shows himself so thoroughly the master of his materials, and who handles them with so much ease and skill. The conclusion seems to be irresistible that the evangelist has made the Baptist and Jesus speak in his own style and express his own thoughts—in other words, that all the discourses in the fourth Gospel are fictitious. It is, of course, possible that some of the matter, thus clothed in another dress, may have been derived from actual words spoken by Jesus; but in the absence of any evidence by which we may test the alleged fact, we cannot say what parts, or whether any, are genuine.

§ 5. *The Discourse on the Living Bread.*

The sixth chapter of the fourth Gospel contains the well-known discourse on the bread of life, in which Jesus is said to affirm that none can have life unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood. These words have been commonly referred to the institution of the Eucharist; but it must be noted that of the alleged historical fact of this institution by Jesus the fourth evangelist had, according to the letter of his narrative, no knowledge; and if these words had reference to that rite as a future institution, they would add another to the number of those topics which would inevitably bewilder and irritate his hearers. Like those which have preceded it, this discourse is thrown into the form of dialogue, and here also, as elsewhere, every spiritual metaphor employed by Jesus is understood carnally by the Jews. Thus, when Jesus speaks of the bread which came down from heaven, his hearers ask him to give them that bread evermore, evidently attaching to the words the same sense in which the Samaritan woman understood the promise of living water. There is no doubt of this; for when Jesus in his next reply succeeds in convincing them that the bread is spiritual, they murmur at him (v. 41) for

describing himself as come from heaven to be the living bread. Yet by an oversight, the evangelist represents them as asking for this bread (v. 36), when Jesus (v. 33) had already identified himself with the bread from heaven. Still more, it is strange that the Jews should have raised no protest against the assertion that 'Moses gave them not bread from heaven.' The statement contradicts passages in the Pentateuch and in the Psalms, with which they must have been familiar. They would at once have cited the passage (put into the mouth of Jesus himself during the tempting or trying), 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God;' and if they preferred a more literal meaning, they might have reminded him that God had opened for their forefathers the doors of heaven and fed them with angels' food—nay, that, in the very words used by Jesus, he had rained down manna and given them of the bread of heaven.¹

Thus far they might have followed him; and if he had so addressed them, they probably would have followed him. The case is altered when he converts the metaphor into the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood. Here it was certain that they would not understand him; and in complete contrast with his method in the other Gospels, he proceeds deliberately to quench the smoking flax (for they had prayed him to give them the living bread) by uttering still harder sayings, until many even of his disciples ask who can hear them. Where in all this do we see the gentle and tender teacher, who, by his graphic and vivid parables, by images drawn from familiar objects and scenes, leads the dull and ignorant onward like little children, until they feel themselves breathing a purer atmosphere, and catch some glimpses, however faint, of the light that streams from heaven?

§ 6. *Discourses on the Person of the Christ, and other subjects.*

The discourses given in the succeeding chapters are so similar in character to the one just examined, that they may be dismissed

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 24.

with a few words. They are marked by the same language respecting the person of the Christ. They tell us, like the earlier discourses of his descent from heaven (vii. 18, 28), of living water (38), of light and darkness (viii. 12), of witness received from men and witness borne from above (13-19), of those who are from beneath and him who is from above (23), of freedom and bondage (32-33). All these ideas, as we might expect, are thoroughly misunderstood; nor can it be said that any effort is made to remove the misapprehension. It is quite certain that such a method applied to an average English audience at the present day would very soon exasperate them. No other result, indeed, was possible, for when the Jews (vii. 27) say that they know whence Jesus is (meaning that he was born and bred in Nazareth), Jesus answers that *they know him* and also whence he is (using the words not in a geographical or historical but in a metaphysical sense), and immediately goes on to use language which, without explanation, could not fail to be offensive to them. But the whole of the discourse in the next chapter turns upon the express assertion that they *do not know him* (viii. 14, 19); and here, again (viii. 38), Jesus suddenly draws a contrast between his Father and their father, by whom the Jews, not unnaturally, suppose that Abraham is meant; nor is it until two or three more reproofs have been given that it turns out (v. 44) that their father is the devil. Could any mode be devised more effectual for rousing a spirit of determined resistance, and repressing all the better feelings of their nature? Having brought them to a point which, seemingly, made it useless to say anything more, Jesus adds another enigmatical phrase, that they who keep his sayings shall never taste of death. This, of course, is by the plan of this Gospel construed into an exemption from physical death; and the reply is, that Abraham and all other good men have died, like every one else. Even now, instead of telling them plainly that he was not, and had not been, speaking of physical accidents, and that such gross misconstructions were very unseemly in the handling of purely spiritual truths, Jesus merely says that Abraham had seen his day, and thus leads to

the crowning misapprehension that Jesus, as man, was older than Abraham. This brings Jesus to assert distinctly his pre-existence; and the dialogue ends with a tumult. The result would have created no surprise in any indifferent spectator who had heard Jesus speak of going his way whither the Jews could not follow him, and had listened to the surmise of the Jews that he must intend to kill himself (viii. 22).

The tenth chapter of the fourth Gospel contains the illustration of the good shepherd, which (*v.* 6) is called a parable. This seems to show that the evangelist was aware of the parabolic character of the teaching of Jesus. But the passage relating to the good shepherd is not a parable, for from the image of the shepherd Jesus goes on to speak of himself as the door by which the sheep may go in and out. Thus that which is professedly parable is really allegory; and the conclusion forced on us is that the inability to give a true parable lay with the evangelist, and hence that these discourses are not historical.

At the twenty-fifth verse of the tenth chapter begins a discourse delivered by Jesus at the feast of dedication, three months later than the discourse which ends at *v.* 18. As no intimation is given that Jesus had been absent from Jerusalem in the meantime, we must understand the evangelist to mean that Jesus was making a stay of several months in Jerusalem. How completely this is at variance with the history of the Synoptics, we have already seen.¹ But another difficulty presents itself in the fact that Jesus, after a very few words on his own person and his relation to the Father (25), recurs to the image of the sheep and shepherd, and repeats part of the allegory almost word for word. It is impossible to understand this abrupt transition and sudden resumption of an address delivered more than three months previously. The allegory would not be prominent in the speaker's mind at such a distance of time, and would certainly have faded from the minds of his hearers. But it would not have faded from the mind of the evangelist who had just written down the parable

¹ See Book III., ch. iv.

or allegory; and the connexion of ideas in his own mind has led him to ascribe the repetition to Jesus. The inference is unavoidable that the evangelist was composing his discourses as he went on.

All the discourses hitherto noticed are peculiar to the fourth Gospel. A few detached sayings, here and there, furnish a parallel to sayings in the Synoptics; but they are generally given in a wrong connexion, or in a way which shows that the evangelist misunderstood their meaning. Thus, in ch. iv. 44, we are told that Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country. This is given as a reason for his going into Galilee; and it is added that the Galilæans welcomed him. Moreover, by his word at Cana Jesus heals a nobleman's son who was sick at Capernaum. All this assumes that Galilee was not his country, for, if it had been, then, according to his testimony, he should have been dishonoured there. But, according to the other Gospels, Galilee was his country, and, accordingly, the Synoptic writers say that he was dishonoured there, at least in his own town. Thus in Matthew (xiii. 57) these words are spoken by Jesus as a reason, not for going among a people who will not receive him, but for not doing his mighty works there. In Mark (vi. 4) they serve likewise as an answer to the contemptuous words of his kinsfolk and acquaintance. The contradiction between the Synoptics and the fourth Gospel is here so great that some have insisted on substituting *although* in place of *for* in v. 44, and so have held that Jesus went into Galilee *although* he knew that he should be dishonoured there. But, in the first place, the translation *although* is wholly inadmissible, and indeed, ridiculous; and, in the next place, if admitted, it would prove that Jesus was mistaken, for the very next statement is that the Galilæans welcomed him. Hence some have fallen back on the narrative of the nativity given in the third Gospel, and, affirming that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, assert that these words give his reason for departing from Judæa where he had been dishonoured. But the fourth Gospel itself precludes any such explanation, for that Gospel states (ii. 23) that many

believed on him in Jerusalem at the first passover after the beginning of his ministry; and the first verse of the fourth chapter records the fact that the number of persons baptized by Jesus and his disciples exceeded the number baptized by John the Baptist.

At the end of the fourteenth chapter we find the words, 'Arise, let us go hence.' These words occur also in Matthew (xxvi. 46) and in Mark (xiv. 42). In both, they are spoken in the garden of Gethsemane immediately before the arrival of the betrayer, when Jesus, on coming to the disciples for the third time, finds them all asleep. Thus in the Synoptics they are a command to wake up out of sleep. In the fourth Gospel they are spoken in the same room in which he had with them partaken of the supper described at the beginning of the thirteenth chapter, and they are followed by no result, for, instead of going away, Jesus remains where he was, and continues his discourse through the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, and not until after the prayer contained in the seventeenth chapter are we told that Jesus went over the brook Kedrôn. Hence it has been argued that we have here the testimony of an eye-witness who heard his Master pronounce the command, and saw him rise, and continue standing, while he spoke some more parting words of peace and love. But in this case the fact of the delay would, in all likelihood, have been noted by the evangelist instead of merely continuing the discourse. However this may be, it is still certain that the words occur in the Synoptics in a wholly different connexion; and again we are driven to infer that the Johannine discourses were not spoken by Jesus.

On the whole, then, speaking generally, we have in the Synoptics methods of teaching eminently adapted to men of dull minds and poor education, and a teacher singularly fitted to win the love and waken the devotion of his hearers. We have discourses, most of which are throughout practical, which teach the people how they are to regard the Mosaic law, in what relation they stand to God, and how they may do his will. In the fourth Gospel we have a series of mystical addresses, grounded on principles established by the Alexandrine philosophy, turning chiefly on the office of the

Christ, the pre-existence of the Eternal Logos (or Word), and his relation to the Father, and presenting the recurring contrasts already noted. These discourses, far from tending to instruct and enlighten his hearers, seem rather calculated to irritate and repel them. The connexion of the topics is chiefly verbal; and the topics are so arranged as to exhibit most forcibly the dulness and folly of all with whom Jesus is brought into contact. When his hearers misunderstand him, Jesus immediately utters some saying more enigmatical or obscure than those which have preceded it, and the rabbi Nicodemus is pictured as no more able to fathom his meaning than the Samaritan woman or the rude Galilæan peasantry. Nay, it may be safely said, that, unless they are committed to writing immediately, it is absolutely certain that such dialogues as these will not, and cannot, be correctly reported. But there is not the faintest evidence that the discourses of Jesus were so taken down; and even the most conservative critics can allow that the Johannine Gospel was not set down in writing for something like sixty, if not seventy, years after the time with which it professes to deal. As if this were not enough to show how unhistorical the Johannine discourses are, we are confronted with the further and crowning difficulty, already noticed, that the Baptist and Jesus and the evangelist all use precisely the same language, and think in the same way. It would be hard indeed to imagine more conclusive proof of the fact that the discourses generally are the work of the evangelist himself and not of the speakers to whom they are ascribed.

CHAPTER IX

FURTHER COMPARISON OF THE JOHANNINE AND THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

§ 1. *The Question of Eye-witness.*

THE close agreement of the Gospels which bear the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—an agreement extending frequently to the actual words of whole sentences, paragraphs, and discourses—is signified in the title Synoptic by which they are commonly designated. It cannot, however, be denied that, with these points of large agreement, there are other points of minute difference which have led many to suppose that they are not all the work of eye-witnesses. The preference is generally given to Mark and Luke, and of these two more particularly to Mark. The notes of time in the first Gospel are very faint and indefinite;¹ and the other Gospels frequently supply details and names which are not found in Matthew. The supposed minuteness of detail which is thought to distinguish Mark from the other Synoptics has been regarded as justifying the conclusion that Mark was the original document, of which the other two are expansions. If the proposition were reversed, we should probably be much nearer the truth. The second Synoptic carries with it all the appearance of careful compilation and abridgement; and we shall see that the seeming distinctness of detail consists really of nothing but mere exaggeration, or of those haphazard arrangements which are in favour with writers of plausible fiction. Oral tradition, moreover,

¹ See p. 202.

which tends for the most part to blot out details, will, if they seem likely to serve a purpose, add to or invent them. This tendency is chiefly conspicuous when it treats of any subject which it wishes to make prominent, or of a person whom it has a strong desire to glorify. These two objects were, in a remarkable degree, present to the minds of the early Christians. Thus in Matthew (viii. 16) we are told simply that at eventide many demoniacs were brought to Jesus, and that he healed them all; in Mark (i. 33) it is said that all the city was gathered together at his door. On another occasion, Mark (ii. 2) represents the crowd as leaving no room even about the door; while Luke (xii. 1) represents the multitude as treading on one another. But although these touches may seem to impart reality to the tales, they do not do so really, and they are just such pointless exaggerations as might be made by any one who wished to embellish or enliven a story. The mention of a blind beggar in Jericho leads Mark (x. 46) to give his name, and that of his father. As, therefore, all the details added by Mark and Luke are precisely of this kind, no inference can be fairly drawn in their favour to the disparagement of the first evangelist.

But a comparison with these three Gospels tends greatly to disparage the fourth. In the former, it must be repeated, Jesus generally conciliates his hearers; in John, he more frequently rouses their anger. In the former, they are astonished at the authority of his teaching; in the latter, they try to stone him. In the former, his fame is spread rapidly and noisily abroad; in the latter, the evangelist is careful to say that his words and works left no impression. In the former, the people follow him from all parts; in the latter, the Jews send out officers to seize him. But all this enmity and all these machinations are frustrated in the fourth Gospel, not by any caution or reserve or prudence on the part of Jesus, but for the preternatural reason that his hour was not yet come. He is thus enabled to move about unharmed until the time comes when he must make the final sacrifice.¹ This

¹ See Appendix B.

preternatural repression is seemingly the only reason for describing a state of things so utterly different from that which is depicted in the Synoptic Gospels; and thus, from another path, we are brought back to the conclusion that the fourth Gospel is not historical.

§ 2. *The Kinsfolk of Jesus.*

But a scrutiny of the Synoptic Gospels exhibits, in some cases with singular clearness, the way in which oral tradition modified the materials submitted to it. In the first Gospel (xii. 46) after the controversy provoked by the Pharisaic accusation that Jesus cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils, we are told that the mother and brethren of Jesus desired to speak with him, and that, on being informed of the fact, he declared that his true kinsfolk were not those who were connected with him according to the flesh but they who did the will of his heavenly Father. In the third Gospel (viii. 19) the same story is related; but it is related not, as in Matthew, before the delivery of any of the parables, but after the parable of the sower and the seed, some sentences (about the lighting of a candle), which in Matthew occur in the Sermon on the Mount, being inserted between the parable and this incident. This of itself would suffice to show (if abundant evidence had not been already furnished of the fact) that the evangelists were heedless of historical order, and that no trust can be placed in their sequences of events, unless they are strengthened by adequate collateral testimony. In Mark also (iii. 31) this narrative comes before the parable of the sower and the seed; but the passage which precedes it puts the matter in a very different light.

With the love of minute detail characteristic of the second Gospel, the evangelist had stated that, after the mission of the twelve, the crowd was so great that they could not so much as eat bread. He then goes on to say that those who were connected with him, being convinced that he was beside himself,

wished to get possession of his person. At this point he inserts the charge of the Pharisees that Jesus worked with the aid of Beelzebub (the connexion of ideas which led him to state this being the notion of insanity), and then adds that his mother and his brethren sent the message expressing their wish to see him. The inference, seemingly unavoidable, is that their real wish was to put him under restraint; and on this ground there is nothing surprising in the circumstance that their request should be refused. Many commentators, accordingly, have insisted on the historical accuracy of Mark as explaining and justifying the apparent harshness of his answer. But if it be granted that his mother as well as his kinsfolk held him to be beside himself, what becomes of the truth of the narratives which record the events of the nativity, whether in the first or third Gospels? We have already had to notice more than once the marvellous apathy or forgetfulness of all the actors and spectators in these wonderful scenes; and that events of the most astounding character should leave on the memory no impression whatever, is assuredly more astonishing than any prodigy or marvel or miracle related in the New Testament writings, or in any other. The mother of Jesus, who had heard from the lips of Gabriel that her child should sit for ever on the throne of David, as well as Joseph, who is taught in a dream that the child to be born should save his people from their sins, can, on the coming of the Magi or the visit of the shepherds or the benedictions in the temple, do no more than express anew their astonishment at the things which were done or spoken of him. As time goes on, they seem to forget even the place of his birth. He is now Jesus the Nazarene; and neither they nor Jesus himself can declare, on occasions when such a declaration was urgently called for, that, in fact, he had been born in Bethlehem. When, at the age of twelve years, he is found among the doctors in the temple, his parents understood as little as ever what must be the business of his life. Instead of recounting to their children the marvellous incidents which had preceded and accompanied their birth, Mary and Elisabeth leave them to grow

up strangers to each other, so that, according to the fourth Gospel, the Baptist declares that he had no knowledge of Jesus until he saw the Spirit in the form of a dove alighting upon him. The doctors of the temple know nothing, or remember nothing, of the astounding events which had troubled Herod and Jerusalem only twelve years previously; and when, some eighteen years later, Jesus taught publicly in Jerusalem, not one of them seemingly has the faintest recollection of the boy who had astonished them with his understanding and answers, while all now regard him as an unlettered man (John vii. 15), his lack of education being spoken of as a patent fact. All this, however, is as nothing beside the narrative of Mark. Not only here, as before, has his mother forgotten every incident in the long series of events which began with the angelic salutation, but the ominous juxtaposition of the two passages in the second Gospel¹ implies that she now shares the opinion of his kinsfolk, and regards him as the victim of his own delusions.

Of these several narratives all may be, and all but one must be, not only unhistorical but actual and wilful fabrications, without the slightest foundation in fact. Whatever may be uncertain, it is abundantly clear that the Gospels can in no part be regarded as history, in any legitimate sense of the word; while, at the same time, it is quite possible that the colour thus thrown on this incident in the second Gospel may be due entirely to the imagination of the evangelist.

It is singular, too, that, after the defence of Jesus against the charge of complicity with Beelzebub, Luke also (xi. 27) inserts an anecdote which leads to precisely the same answer which in the other Synoptics Jesus gives to his mother and his brethren. This reply is made to a certain woman in the company who pronounced the womb that bore Jesus to be blessed; but it is not easy to see

¹ The phrase *οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ*, Mark iii. 21, is much wider than the *οἱ ἀδελφοί*, verse 31, and would include his parents as well as his kinsfolk. The fact is not categorically stated; but there is certainly no sign that she differed in opinion from the rest of those who knew him.

why this enthusiasm on her part should be roused by the discourse on the return of the unclean spirits, or by the condemnation of the Pharisees which had preceded it. It is scarcely unreasonable to suppose that the evangelist inserted the story at this point as involving an answer similar to that given elsewhere to the kinsfolk of Jesus.

§ 3. *The Disputes for Precedency.*

The various narratives of disputes for precedence among the disciples involve historical difficulties of the same kind. Of the versions given in Matthew (xviii. 1), Mark (ix. 38), Luke (ix. 46), something has already been said. In addition to these (which relate to the setting up of a child as a model for the disciples' imitation), the first Synoptic mentions (xx. 20) the indignation excited in the minds of the apostles by the request of the mother of Zebedee's children. The same incident is mentioned by Mark (x. 35); but it is not found in any part of the third Gospel.

Finally, there is the dispute for pre-eminence which occurs at the last supper (Luke xxii. 24), and which is stilled by Jesus with a reply which is almost word for word the same as that which had been given after the request of Salome on behalf of James and John. It is, to say the least, singular, that the words, 'whosoever will be great among you, let him be servant of all,' should have been uttered not only when Jesus set up the child before the disciples, and when he refused the request of Zebedee's wife, but also in the great discourse against the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii. 11), and, finally, at the last supper. In the incident recorded in Luke (xxii. 24) there is no motive whatever for any such controversy. The dispute, we are told, followed immediately the announcement that Jesus was to be betrayed—an announcement which, according to Matthew xxvi. 22, made them 'exceeding sorrowful;' and surely this was not a time at which any such trifling and angry thoughts would occupy their minds. But here, as in so many other cases, although there is no practical motive,

the verbal connexion is clear. The evangelist had just mentioned that the disciples began to inquire¹ who should do this thing, and the word which denotes dispute as well as search led him to introduce a statement which he had already given in another connexion.

§ 4. *The Purification of the Temple.*

The difficulties connected with the purification of the temple are far more serious. In Matthew (xxi. 19) we are informed that, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus went into the temple and cast out all who sold and bought there, overthrowing the seats of the money-changers and of those who sold doves. Mark (xi. 31) merely states that he looked round on all things in the temple. Luke (xix. 45), agrees with the first Gospel, except in the omission of any reference to the seats, the money-changers, and the sellers of doves. In the Synoptics, then, this incident occurs very shortly before the crucifixion; and by rousing the 'sore displeasure' of the chief priests and scribes, it tends to bring to a head the opposition already exhibited by them towards Jesus. In the fourth Gospel (ii. 13) it is assigned, not to the passover of the crucifixion, but to the first visit of Jesus to Jerusalem after the commencement of his ministry. The story is also told with some most important points of difference, for we are informed (1) that Jesus, having made a scourge of small cords, drove out not only the buyers and sellers, but the sheep and the oxen; and (2) that when the Jews demanded his warrant for thus acting, Jesus replied by saying, that, if they destroyed the temple, he would raise it up again in three days. The evangelist here states that Jesus meant in these words, not the temple of Solomon, Nehemiah, or Herod, but his own body, which would rise in three days from the grave. Like Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, and, indeed, like all who converse with Jesus in this Gospel, the Jews utterly misunderstood him; but, strangely enough, instead of being exasperated, as they are by his later discourses, they apparently take no

¹ συζητεῖν.

notice; nor is anything else in the fourth Gospel made to turn on this declaration. That the Jews should contrast the forty-six years during which the temple was in building with the three days in which it should be rebuilt by Jesus, is really incredible. They would know that, if the work was to be done in that time, it must be done by no earthly instruments and no earthly builders, and that there was, therefore, no reason why it should not be restored in three hours or three minutes. But, as it stands in the fourth Gospel, the story, so far as the Jews were concerned, is absolutely meaningless. They ask what warrant Jesus had for acting as he had acted towards the money-changers and cattle-sellers; and they are told that, if they choose to pull down the temple, Jesus will build it up again in three days. There is no connexion between the question and the answer. They might fairly ask, further, why they should take the trouble to pull down their temple in order to give him an opportunity for rebuilding it in a prodigious or preternatural way, and then, perhaps, find themselves disappointed in the matter of its restoration. The task of demolition would, moreover, be a work of months or of years; and so they might ask, further, how its future restoration could be to them any warrant for his acting as he had done. In short, from their standpoint, the words here put into the mouth of Jesus are wholly and absurdly irrelevant. We cannot suppose that he uttered them, and it is impossible, therefore, that this Johannine story can be historical.

But if nothing turns on this declaration in the fourth Gospel, it is otherwise with the Synoptics, who mention that part of the 'false witness' borne against Jesus at his trial was based on the assertion that he could in three days build up the temple if it were thrown down (Matt. xxvi. 61; Mark xiv. 58); the inference from these statements being that Jesus had never uttered these words, for, if he had spoken them, the testimony, though it might be mistaken, would not have been false, nor could they be blamed for misapprehending words which related to a still future event, quite unconnected with the Solomonian or Herodian temple. But,

according to the fourth Gospel, Jesus in fact had spoken these words, and, therefore, the witness mentioned by the other evangelists was not false. We may take whichever alternative we please; but in either case, the conclusion remains that the accounts of the closing days as well as of the beginning of the ministry contain some false statements. Nor must it be forgotten that when, on the day after the casting forth of the crowd and the beasts, the priests and elders in the Synoptics (Matt. xxi. 23; Mark xi. 27; Luke xxii. 2) ask him his reason for doing as he had done, in words closely resembling those in the Johannine narrative (ii. 18), Jesus makes a reply which has nothing in common with the mysterious—and to them at the time, incomprehensible or unmeaning—saying respecting the overthrow and rebuilding of the temple.

If, then, the narrative as given in the fourth Gospel be true, nothing is more certain than that Jesus with his scourge drove out sellers, buyers, and victims all together, and that he did this by himself, for no hint is breathed that any took part with him in this work. Indeed, such co-operation would not have accorded with the plan of this Gospel, for, throughout, Jesus by his inherent majesty keeps back his enemies, and frustrates all their attempts, ‘until his hour is come;’ and even when it is come, they who are sent to seize him, go back and fall to the ground, at his simple question, ‘Whom seek ye?’ Thus the conclusion is, that one man, and that man a stranger (for it is described as his first public act in Jerusalem) interferes with, and puts a stop to, a long-established traffic, and expels a multitude not only of men but of cattle.

Were there, then, two purifications of the temple, one at the beginning, the other at the close, of the ministry? The Synoptics clearly know nothing of the first one; the fourth Gospel takes no notice of the last; and it must be allowed that the weight of probability lies in favour of the former. The Johannine Gospel runs counter to the whole sequence of events in the Synoptics, and more particularly, as we have seen, represents the Messiahship of Jesus as fully known to the Baptist, to Andrew, Peter, Nathanael,

to the nameless or the beloved disciple, to Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman and her fellow-townsmen, and to the Jews in general, at a time when in the other Gospels even the apostles are described as profoundly ignorant of the fact.

There remains the exceeding unlikelihood of the whole transaction as recorded in the fourth Gospel. At the last passover, Jesus, coming from Galilee with a body of enthusiastic followers, might not impossibly be countenanced by them in this forcible expulsion; but at the first passover such aid could not be looked for, and the evangelist seems expressly to preclude the idea. These difficulties led Dr. Milman to assert¹ that the traffic in the Court of the Gentiles (for it was nothing more) was regarded with general disapprobation by the Jews. There is no evidence of such a fact. It was, indubitably, approved by the priesthood; and it is certain that those who conducted the traffic would have been supported by them against any attempts at violent suppression. The absence of this traffic is mentioned also in rabbinical writings, not as adding to the solemnity of the place, but as a mournful token of desolation. Hence it is not at all clear, as Dr. Milman affirmed it to be, 'that this assertion of the sanctity of the temple must have been a popular act with the majority of the worshippers.' But it is undeniable that the fourth Gospel assumes the absence of all resistance. The buyers and sellers depart abashed; but as it is highly unlikely that they should do so, Dr. Milman maintained that there was resistance, while he also lessened greatly the share which Jesus himself took in the matter. 'Though Jesus,' we are told, 'is said personally to have exerted himself, assisting with a light scourge, probably, in driving out the cattle, it is not likely that if he had stood alone, either the calm and commanding dignity of his manner, or even his appeal to the authority of the sacred writings which forbade the profanation of the temple as a place of merchandise, would have overpowered the sullen obstinacy of men engaged in a gainful traffic sanctioned by ancient usage.'

In other words, Dr. Milman had not the slightest scruple in

¹ *History of Christianity*, Book i. chap. 3.

contradicting the statements of the evangelists when historical probability called on him to do so. Where, then, is the essential difference between his method and that of the most rigorous historical critics? But if such a method is to be employed at all, we may surely ask whether this forcible repression was really called for. The traffic was carried on in the Court of the Gentiles, not within the sacred precincts of the sanctuary. Assuredly it must be carried on somewhere, if the offerings for the sacrifices were to be supplied to those who could not bring the victims for themselves. There was no profanation; and there is no assertion that either buyers or sellers were turbulent and disorderly. On every ground it was to the interest of the latter, at least, that they should not be so. The offering of victims for sale is not forbidden in the so-called Levitical enactments; and it is not easy to understand why it should be. If, then, as Dr. Milman thought, the act itself is 'no more than a courageous zealot for the law might have done,' it is still an act which would call forth vehement opposition. Fully convinced of this, Origen attributed the submission of the buyers and sellers to the superhuman majesty of Jesus, and hence counted this among the greatest of his marvels or miracles. According to Dr. Milman, it was no marvel or miracle at all; nor is it easy to see why the pledge to raise the temple again after its demolition should jar on the religious sensibilities of the Jews, if only they believed that the pledge would be redeemed by the fulfilment of the promise.

It seems strange, however, that Dr. Milman should have failed to see the disparaging effect of his remarks. The image of Jesus, helping with a light scourge to drive out a ponderous mass of unwieldy cattle, has little of majesty or beauty; while the supposition that others, taking his side, were aiding in expelling the men, converts the whole scene into a wild tumult which must have called for the interference of the Roman police. But, lastly the speech about the temple was, as Dr. Milman admits, completely misunderstood. The plan of the fourth Gospel required that it should be; but Dr. Milman could not withhold some

explanation. 'The gesture,' he asserts, 'by which Jesus probably confined his meaning to the temple of his body, which, though destroyed, was to be raised again in three days, was seen indeed by his disciples, yet even by them but imperfectly understood.' To this it should surely be enough to reply, that an honest man would be bound by the words which he uttered, without any reservation, unless the hearers were distinctly made acquainted with that reservation; and that to escape under a reservation not distinctly made known to them is nothing less than falsehood. But there is not the slightest indication in the text that any gesture was seen by any one, or that any gesture was ever made; and the notion that Jesus deliberately uttered words relating to future events, privately signifying to his disciples that the apparent meaning of his speech was not the real one, degrades the whole act into a piece of undignified and dishonest mockery. But the whole story is, from beginning to end, impossible; and the Johannine and Synoptic accounts must alike be dismissed as altogether unhistorical. The words put into the mouth of Jesus point in quite another direction.¹

§ 5. *The Anointing of Jesus. General results thus far reached.*

It is mentioned in all the four Gospels that Jesus was anointed by a woman as he sat at meat; but the accounts are more or less inconsistent and contradictory throughout. In the first Gospel (xxvi. 6) it is recorded as having taken place in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. The woman here is of blameless reputation, and the objection taken by the disciples is on the ground of wastefulness. The account in the second Gospel (xiv. 3) is substantially the same, the chief difference being that the evangelist does not specify the persons who raised the objection. In the third Gospel (vii. 36) the incident is described as taking place in Galilee early in the ministry of Jesus. Here the woman is a sinner, and she anoints not his head but

¹ See Appendix B.

his feet, which she wipes with the hair of her head. The objection in this case is taken, not by the disciples, but by the Pharisee in whose house the incident occurred; and the reply of Jesus has no reference to his approaching death or to the power of always doing good to the poor, but turns on the contrast between the niggardly welcome of the Pharisee and the overflowing love of the sinful woman. In the fourth Gospel (xii 1) the woman who anoints is not only not a sinner, but she is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus. The house in which Jesus was being entertained is not named; but Lazarus, it is added, was here, after his resurrection from the dead, among those who sat at meat. Like the sinful woman in Luke, Mary anoints his feet, and wipes them with her hair; and the objection is raised in this instance, not by all the disciples, but only by Judas Iscariot. Jesus, in his reply, merely bids them to leave her alone, making no reference to the memorial which shall be preserved of this event wherever this gospel should be preached.

The contradictions are so great that the supposition of two anointings has been commonly approved; but if we assume that there were two, must we not allow that there were more? Apart from the character of the woman who anointed him, the entertainment, according to the first and second Gospels, was given in the house of Simon the leper; the fourth Gospel implies that it took place in that of Lazarus. In the former, again, it preceded the passover only by two days; in the latter, by six; and what is more singular is, that the former do not know the woman's name, although in John she is the sister of his dearest friend. Other points of difference, already noted, need not be again mentioned here; but enough has been said to show that the accounts in Matthew and Mark differ from the narrative of John, almost as much as all the three differ from that of Luke. Hence many have held with Origen that there were three anointings; and we are surprised at the regularity with which, in each case, objections are raised against the work of the woman, and the sameness of the arguments by which Jesus defends her.

But inasmuch as Matthew, Mark, and John all place the incident in the last week of the ministry, it may, perhaps, be conceded that all the three speak of the same event; and on this hypothesis there would be only two anointings. On a further scrutiny other points of resemblance come out, which seem to show that, after all, Luke is giving only another version of the same event, for he also states that the meal was in the house of Simon, only he calls him a Pharisee instead of a leper. Like the other Synoptics, Luke makes the woman a stranger who comes in, not one belonging to the house; and, on the other hand, the mode of anointing in Luke is the same as in John. The conclusion seems to be that we have here three versions of the same event, and fresh proof is forced upon us of the slender trust which can be placed upon any part of the gospels as historical records.

In the present instance, it must not be forgotten that the features introduced into the narrative of John have been rendered necessary by the plan of the fourth Gospel. The evangelist wished to mark the point at which the treachery of Judas betrayed itself to the disciples; but it is scarcely credible that, if the objection had been raised by Judas only, the Synoptics should not have stated the fact. It is still more strange that they should not know, or should not mention, that the brother of the woman was one whom Jesus had raised from the dead. We thus encounter one of the many circumstances which show the complete ignorance of the Synoptics of the most stupendous marvel or miracle ever wrought by Jesus. In this case, indeed, we may fairly argue from their silence that they did not know the woman, far less know that she was Mary of Bethany.

Clearly, then, we have here narratives which have passed through the crucible of oral tradition, and have come out with forms and colours very different from those which originally belonged to them. But it is scarcely worth while to inquire which of the gospel narratives may be nearest to the truth. We have seen that mere particularity of detail is no proof at all that the narrative is that of an eye-witness, and we have had abundant

evidence that none of the evangelists cared much for notes of either time or place. Still here, as elsewhere, the balance inclines in favour of the Synoptics. If the incidents occurred as they are related in the fourth Gospel, it seems incredible that tradition should have converted Mary of Bethany into a sinner, and have transferred to all the disciples an objection on the score of wastefulness, which was raised only by Judas Iscariot.

The tale of the woman taken in adultery, given in the eighth chapter of the fourth Gospel, is so beset with difficulties that the most conservative of commentators have thankfully availed themselves of its absence from the earliest manuscripts to declare that it formed no portion of the original Johannine document. They are probably right; but the mere strangeness of the narrative is not in itself a valid reason for asserting that it is spurious. The story may be speedily dismissed. Jesus is represented as sorely perplexed, although it is hard to see why he should be. The reply which he is said to have made, after a long pause, seems to imply that no magistrate has any business to inflict punishment for any offence unless he feels himself guiltless of all offences—a doctrine which would end in complete anarchy. Nor is it likely that all of those who heard him would have been so weak and ignorant as to be entrapped by such a fallacy. Some of them, surely, would have said, ‘I am not sinless; but I have yet to learn that only the guiltless may interfere to put down vice or crime. If I am called upon to vindicate the law, I am prepared to do so.’

Whatever may be the origin of this tale, it is certainly old; for either this narrative, or one substantially the same, is mentioned by Eusebius¹ as being found in the gospel of the Hebrews. Indeed, the only difference seems to have been, that in this case the woman was charged not with one but with many sins. But this very diversity at once carries us to Luke’s account of the woman whose many sins were forgiven because she loved much; and some ground seems to be thus furnished for the surmise that the two stories are connected, the idea of anointing as an act of love and

¹ *H. E.* iii. 39.

an act of penance, serving to link the two together, and thus to turn the sinful woman into the one who anointed him, and the latter into a sinful woman.

Thus far, then, we have examined a series of narratives, not one of which can be accepted as really historical. Of all that passed before the beginning of the ministry we know absolutely nothing. The stories of the nativity exclude each other; and they all belong to that charmed region in which popular fancy deals with the phenomena of the outward world. Even when we come to the period of the ministry, the inconsistencies, contradictions, and even the absurdities of the narratives, are, in most cases, so glaring that we have been enabled to dismiss them as utterly untrustworthy, and to trace the process by which pure fable has overlaid with fictions the slight substratum of fact on which it may have had to work.

The amount of historical information thus far obtained, if there be any, is very small indeed. The earlier life of Jesus of Nazareth is hidden behind an impenetrable veil, which, at best, is only partially lifted when we reach the period of the ministry, for of the ministry we do not know whether it was confined to a single year, or whether it extended over two or three. We do not know whether Jesus appeared in Jerusalem as a teacher before his last passover, or whether he taught there publicly two or three times a year. We do not know, in short, whether his ministry belonged exclusively to Galilee or was primarily for the people of Judæa. Even those narratives in which the Synoptics agree are found in very different connexions, while the verbal agreement is often so close as to force us to the conclusion that they are not independent narratives at all, but one and the same tale drawn from some older document, which each evangelist has embodied in his work just where it might be most convenient for him to do so. If the Synoptic accounts of the callings of the disciples be correct, the narrative of the fourth Gospel must be fiction. Reasoning from this basis, we should come to the conclusion, warranted by express statements of the Synoptics, that Jesus did

not exhibit himself distinctly as Messiah until a very late period in his ministry, and then only in private to his more immediate followers; that he never exhibited himself at all as Messiah in the sense of the Johannine Gospel, namely, as the Eternal Logos, which tabernacled in man;¹ and that, consequently, the Johannine discourses in which he is made to claim and to set forth this character are the composition of the evangelist himself. Of the character of his disciples and the time of their respective callings we can affirm nothing. The accounts are contradictory throughout, and it is impossible that they can be all true, while they may all be false. But if the Synoptic accounts be in any degree trustworthy, the Johannine story must be rejected as a later fabrication.

If, again, we may place any trust in the Synoptic Gospels, we shall conclude that he taught rather by direct sermons in the simplest and most unambiguous style, or by parables adapted to rouse the mental and moral perceptions of a gross and degraded people; and that the patience and gentleness with which he led them on, step by step, from spiritual darkness into light could scarcely be exceeded. Here, again, if we give credit to the Synoptic writers, we must refuse to put any trust in the fourth evangelist, who represents Jesus as speaking riddles which bewilder his hearers, and in many instances stir up vehement opposition.

Of the order of these discourses and of the several incidents in the Synoptics, we have no definite knowledge, inasmuch as between many passages there is no connexion whatever, while in others the connexion is purely verbal; and even for the parables, if we say that they occupied a prominent place in his teaching, and that some of them may have come down to us as he uttered them, we cannot deny that some of them have been strangely perverted, that portions of two or more parables have been blended or twisted together, and that, whatever the parables may be, the explanations attached to some of them are indubitably spurious. This element of parable in his teaching is, as we have seen, wholly

¹ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, John i. 14.

lacking in the fourth Gospel; and this want is one among the multitude of overwhelming arguments for the unhistorical character of that Gospel.

With regard to the Johannine discourses, it must be said that for not one of them is there the slightest historical evidence forthcoming, while of some, as of the conversation with Nicodemus, it is impossible that the evangelist could obtain any information in the absence of a report either from Nicodemus or from Jesus himself. Moreover, in the fact that the evangelist, the Baptist, and Jesus, express themselves in precisely the same language, we have cogent evidence that the writer of the Gospel composed all the discourses in it as he went along.

Finally, a comparison of the Synoptic Gospels has exhibited a certain amount of inconsistency and contradiction on almost every point which they have in common; and we have seen that these variations are precisely such as we should expect to find in narratives handed down by oral tradition. It is enough, therefore, to say that of the great Teacher himself we have no contemporary picture; and if the portrait be indistinct, we must accept the fact, and acknowledge it as such.

CHAPTER X

THE NARRATIVES OF MARVELS, WONDERS, OR MIRACLES, IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

§ 1. *Character of the Wonders in the New Testament Writings.*

THE gospel narratives of events which we have thus far examined do not turn on any marvellous circumstances, and are not set forth as preternatural or miraculous. I do not, of course, speak now of the stories of the infancy and childhood, for on these rests the impenetrable veil of mythical tradition. But when we have left these things behind us, we find still inconsistencies, contradictions, and impossibilities almost everywhere. We have now to deal with stories of another sort. In the narratives of the ministry, the contradictions hitherto laid bare relate to the commonest matters of fact. Either the Baptist knew Jesus from his infancy, or he did not. After the baptism he either knew Jesus to be the Eternal Logos, or Word, or he did not. Either Peter was summoned by Andrew distinctly to find in Jesus the Messiah, or he was not. Either Jesus drove out the traffickers from the temple at the beginning and the close of his ministry, or he did not. Either a few days after his baptism he was at a marriage-feast in Galilee, or he was not. On all these, as on many other points, the gospel narratives completely contradict each other or themselves. The inevitable conclusion is, that in the most ordinary matters of fact, the evangelists are not trustworthy historians, and could not have been eye-witnesses of the events which they relate.

But their accounts are not confined to matters which fall within the ordinary range of human experience. They abound in incidents which are astonishing or inconceivable, and which run counter to all impressions derived from observation of natural phenomena. At once, therefore, and before examining any one of these narratives, we are bound distinctly to affirm that, whether as witnesses or as historians of such alleged events, the evangelists are not worthy of credit. The fact that the gospels are unhistorical in common things renders an examination of all narratives of wonders superfluous. It is quite unnecessary to maintain that marvels or miracles are impossible. It is enough to have shown that in the gospels, so far as we have examined them, there is not a single story which would stand the test of judicial scrutiny.

On these tales of marvels we need not dwell long. Yet it may not be useless to show that, in all these narratives, we have contradictions and mistakes similar in kind to those which run through the narratives of ordinary events.

Although the duty of accounting for the growth of these stories must be persistently disclaimed, it is well to note that even the most conservative theologians see, in the wonders of the Old Testament writings, the types of greater wonders to be wrought by the Messiah; nor will any such apologists feel any wish to deny the general similarity of the latter to the former. As Moses fed the Israelites with manna from heaven, so Jesus fed thousands with food which he had preternaturally multiplied. As Moses brought water out of the stony rock, so Jesus turned water into wine at the marriage-feast in Cana. As Elisha prevented men who were not blind from seeing, or gave them a marvellously extended vision, so Jesus healed even those who had been born blind. As Elijah raised from death the widow's son at Zarephath, and Elisha restored the dead child of the Shunamite woman, so Jesus called forth from the grave one who had been dead four days.

There is, throughout, a genuine agreement, the chief difference being that the miracles of the New Testament books seem to be

more complex. It can scarcely be denied, therefore, that the narratives of wonders in the Old Testament scriptures might furnish the germ and determine the character of similar narratives in those of the New. Of course, the popular answer is that both the Old and New Testament prodigies are equally facts; but our examination of the gospel narratives has already shown that we can place no reliance on their assertions even about ordinary matters. While, then, we set aside both the former and the latter series as equally unhistorical, the Old Testament narratives undeniably existed, and might not impossibly excite the inventive powers of the writers of the New.

Hence the important questions to which the answer is imperatively demanded are not so much whether Jesus worked wonders, as whether he said that he had worked them, or laid claim to the power of working them. But these are just the questions which the evangelists or their informants have rendered it impossible to answer. We have noticed, already, the most prominent characteristics of the age and society in which they lived¹—that it was an age of boundless credulity, and a singularly elaborate and degrading demonology—that their appetite for things prodigious was insatiable—and that the rapid forgetfulness of one set of wonders was immediately succeeded by an impatient longing for another. It would be, therefore, strictly impossible for them to exhibit the life and works of any teacher except through an atmosphere of miracles, which must make everything dim and misty or distorted. The more that they loved and venerated the Master, the stronger would be the temptation to ascribe to him powers which should leave those of the greatest prophets in the shade. At best, we can but expect to glean from the gospels a few isolated utterances which may throw light on the thoughts of Jesus with respect to things of which it was impossible for his hearers or followers to give a truthful and correct report. Any one of these strong utterances would carry more weight than a hundred stories of signs and wonders, to which oral tradition had given many shapes,

¹ See pp. 16, 135.

and which it had often invested with very strange colouring. His emphatic declaration that 'no sign shall be given to this generation,' would, if we accept it as historical (and we should wish to do so), be decisive of the question. It would assure us that all the claims which he is said to make of such powers came only from the imaginations of his disciples, and that he no more shared their convictions on the subject of demoniacal possession than he proclaimed himself a worker of outward signs and prodigies. But the flexibility of oral tradition seems to foil us everywhere. The explicit assertion that no sign shall be given is found in one passage only (Mark viii. 12). In the first Gospel (xvi. 4) the declaration is that they shall have no sign but that of the prophet Jonas; and this sign (xii. 39) is explained elsewhere to refer to an event yet future, which could not be a sign to any one until it had actually occurred. It is useless, therefore, to look for definite evidence as to the opinions of the teacher on subjects which were completely distorted in their eyes by the force of ancient prejudices and prepossessions.

That Jesus is said to have conferred on his disciples the power of casting out devils (Matt. x. 1; Mark iii. 15; Luke ix. 1) we can no more deny than that, when they returned exulting because the very devils had been subject to them, Jesus is said to give thanks as having seen Satan like lightning fall from heaven (Luke x. 18). Here, then, we have what looks like an unequivocal assertion of the existence of devils, and of the possibility of their acting in the way popularly attributed to them. But we cannot ascribe their opinions to the Master until we can get reports which are not vitiated by the credulity and superstition of the disciples or the evangelists.

§ 2. *The Expulsion of the Evil Spirit at Capernaum.*

In the fourth Gospel the first miracle of Jesus is the conversion of water into wine at Cana. In Mark i. 23 and Luke iv. 33, it is the silencing and expulsion of an evil spirit at Capernaum. The

contradiction is direct: but we may note that the narratives in the second and third Gospels throw light on two subjects. If the devil was forbidden to speak of him as the Holy One of God, this would be a proof that Jesus had not at that time proclaimed his Messiahship, as the fourth Gospel asserts that he had. The narratives, further, furnish evidence of the mode in which the evangelists looked at the question.

The demon is here regarded not only as usurping the consciousness of the man, but as possessing a distinct personality, and as endowed with powers of apprehension far beyond those of mortal men. It is not less a fact that Jesus is represented as fearing that the bystanders might receive the knowledge of his Messiahship from the demon—the conclusion being that no human creature at the time knew Jesus as the Messiah; that Jesus had not revealed the fact but wished to conceal it; but that, nevertheless, the devils knew it as clearly as the Baptist is said to have known it in the first chapter of the fourth Gospel.

§ 3. *The Demoniacs of Gadara.*

In the cure of the demoniacs at Gadara the Synoptic narratives are not altogether consistent. According to Mark vi. 1 and Luke viii. 26, there was only one solitary lunatic. In Matthew viii. 28, there are two. Here, as elsewhere, some particular details are peculiar to Mark. In the first Gospel, the demoniacs shrink from the approach of Jesus; in the third, the sufferer falls at his feet, entreating that he may not be tormented; in the second, he runs from a distance to meet him. But why should the demon do this, who hated the sight and voice of the Messiah? In Matthew, again, there is nothing to show that the number of the possessing demons was large; the name *legion* is found only in Mark and Luke; and far from proving that we have here the testimony of eye-witnesses, it may be a mere contrivance to explain the subsequent action on the herd of swine. The one writer may have supposed that two demons might possess the

whole; the other, seemingly, thought that there must be one demon to each brute.

If once we have so far confused our minds as to think that an individual being may consist of two agents, the additional tax on our powers of faith may be small when we are asked to believe that the number of agents is indefinitely multiplied, as in the seven devils of Mary of Magdala, and the legion of the Gadarenes. Still, even on this hypothesis, it is not easy to see why intelligent spirits, however impure, should wish to enter into brute forms, or why, when they have done so, they should hurry them to instant destruction. It is, clearly, not a case of collective action of the spirits on the herd generally. The demons as plainly enter into the swine as they come out of the men. It is also certain that the demons pray to be allowed to enter into them, in order to find an abode in them; but, instead of doing this, they immediately destroy their chosen habitation. There are not lacking interpreters who tell us that the destruction was caused by the madmen rushing on the swine with loud cries, while the keepers fled away; and, again, that the cure could not be complete in the men unless the spirits were permitted to enter the brutes. The former is a story of which the gospels know nothing; the latter plea involves complete unbelief in Jesus as a divine worker. The argument, indeed, becomes ludicrous as well as profane, when we remember that all devils did not desire to go into brutes, and that the need of their entering them is nowhere stated to be an indispensable condition of leaving the human body. If the narrative betrays confusion of thought, it is not difficult to account for its doing so. The demons sought an abiding place, and on this view the swine should have remained alive; but some visible effect was called for in order to show the reality of the possession and the efficacy of the exorcism. This feature, which is common to the mediæval legends generally, is seen in the story told of Apollonius of Tyana, who caused a devil, after leaving the body of a young man, to overturn a statue which stood near. Hence it became necessary to destroy the swine; and a piece of incongruous patchwork is the result.

Of the indignation felt by the owners of the herd at the loss of their property, we need say little. It may be right enough that violators of the Mosaic law should be punished; but it is not proved that these men were bound to observe that law. If we justify the mischief thus caused on the grounds on which we explain natural visitations of drought or flood, we at once annihilate the human consciousness of Jesus.

§ 4. *The Lunatic healed after the Transfiguration.*

In the story of the cure of the lunatic, which immediately follows that of the transfiguration, Mark (ix. 14), as compared with the other Synoptics, exhibits the same climax as in the last instance, for he makes the crowd run towards Jesus to salute him, and represents them as greatly amazed (although it is not easy to see why they should be so, except on the hypothesis that his face, like that of Moses, retained some extraordinary brilliancy). In Luke (ix. 37) we are merely told that the people met him, while in Matthew (xvii. 14) Jesus, with the three disciples, advances to meet the multitude.

In the second Gospel the whole matter turns on faith—faith in the recipient not less than in those who are instrumental in imparting the gift; in the others, the disciples are told that this particular kind of demon could not be expelled but by, or after, prayer and fasting. The narratives are somewhat inconsistent; but what the story proves is, that the evangelists or their informants were not only convinced of the personality of demons, but assured that a classification of them, based on their dispositions, was a reality.

§ 5. *Cures of the Leprous and the Blind.*

With the alleged cures of lepers we may deal more summarily. It is enough to mark that in each case the suddenness of the cure is the point on which these stories turn. As the hand of Aaron

passed from health into thorough leprosy, and back again, in the course of a few seconds, so Jesus is said to cure by his word men who are spoken of as full of leprosy (Matt. viii. 3; Mark i. 42; Luke v. 12). Now it is a known fact that confirmed leprosy is among the most obstinate and malignant of diseases, and that it is so as resulting from a thorough vitiation of all the fluids of the body. For the same reason it is a disease over which the imagination has no control. No effort of will on the part of the sufferer, no sudden impulse or excitement, will enable him to throw off his burden even for a moment. Hence such narratives, if they are to be credited, need far greater corroboration than do tales of demoniacal possession; and no such corroborative evidence is forthcoming.

The same difficulty applies with full force to all the narratives which relate the cure of blind men. Healings of men partially blind, by the employment of physical means or instruments, are in no sense marvels or miracles; and it is quite certain that the evangelists do not intend to describe any such natural cures. But blindness, not less than leprosy, is a disease or defect wholly beyond the influence of imagination; and the slender trust which can be placed in the gospel narratives of the most ordinary events does not justify us in taking their word when they speak of things which run counter to human experience generally.

Nor must it be forgotten that the fourth evangelist, in relating the cure of a man born blind, appends to it a momentous conversation (ix. 8-20), of which the Synoptic writers know absolutely nothing. Indeed, it is but a slight exaggeration to say, that, no matter what may be the subject in hand, the one set of writers are profoundly ignorant of everything stated by the other. But it must be admitted that the narratives to which such incidents lead are far more important than the incidents themselves, and that, if the Synoptic writers had ever heard of such discourses, they must have taken some notice of them, however slight, more especially as the miracle is said to have been publicly wrought, and the words are said to have been spoken, in the presence of the multi-

tude at Jerusalem. But they have not noticed them, and thus the presumption, or rather the certain conclusion, is that these discourses are altogether unhistorical.

§ 6. *The Connexion between Sin and Disease.*

A far more serious, and, indeed, a vital question, is brought before us in the narratives which exhibit, or seem to exhibit, the relations of diseases to sins. Are the several evils to which flesh is heir direct inflictions, by way of punishment, for secret or open misdeeds, whether of the sufferer himself or of his fathers? In the popular Jewish belief undoubtedly they were so. This belief pervades the Pentateuch, and is prominent throughout the book of Job. It is seen not less unmistakeably in the question of the disciples, 'Hath this man sinned, or his parents, that he should be born blind?' (John ix. 2)—a question clearly pointing to the notion that a man may sin in his mother's womb, and so come maimed into the world. The reply, which says that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, is taken by many as asserting the general proposition that bodily defects or diseases are not necessarily the consequences of sin; and this may have been the conviction and the teaching of the great Master himself. Yet, far from laying down any general proposition, the answer, speaking simply of the particular case before him, says that this man was born blind not by reason of sin, but in order that the works of God should be shown forth in him. So the man who lay for eight-and-thirty years at the pool of Bethesda is, according to the story, told to sin no more lest a worse thing should happen to him (John v. 14), the inference being that there was a direct connexion between previous sins and his bodily infirmity. The attempt to evade this issue by supposing that the man knew that he had brought on his disease by sensual excess, does violence to the wording of the narrative, which gives no intimation of anything of the kind.

The other passage (Luke xviii. 1-8) on which much stress is

laid, asserts that the Galilæans who had perished were not to be held sinners above all others, but that, if the hearers did not repent, they would bring upon themselves like destruction. The great Master may have spoken more unequivocally and more decisively; but the words put into his mouth say that the sin of the Galilæans had sealed their doom, and that a like result would follow in the case of those who heard him. If the evangelist had not intended to convey this meaning, the reply must have been to this effect: 'They did not die for their sins, because you, who may be equally sinful, have not been punished in the same way, and may not be so visited hereafter.' The narrative throws little light on the thoughts of the great Teacher; but it shows that the evangelist regarded bodily afflictions as evidence of the sin of the sufferers.

It is true, indeed, that the beatitudes in Luke (vi. 20) on the poor and hungry of this world, and such parables as that of the rich man and Lazarus, affirm that misfortunes and maladies are to be regarded as tokens of favour and grace, and as furnishing grounds for a summary compensation hereafter. The two ideas are not consistent. On the one side, we have the old Jewish notion of chastisement for sins in the form of bodily maladies, and on the other, the more modern idea, which especially marked the Essenes, that God's favour was accorded more particularly, or even exclusively, to those who, in the temporal sense, were sick, poor, and needy. If these two conflicting ideas are found in the teaching put into the mouth of Jesus, the inconsistency is probably the result of misapprehensions or prepossessions on the part of the evangelists, or of those from whom they received their information.

§ 7. *Involuntary Cures.*

In the narratives of cures thus far examined, Jesus is exhibited as acting entirely by his own will, although he used his power only on behalf of those who had faith to be healed, or for whom the outward healing would be spiritually beneficial. There is

another class of cures which speaks of his action as involuntary, or even unconscious. These cures call for careful scrutiny. When we have an affluence of power from the person of Jesus, with virtue to heal those who avail themselves of it, we are confronted with a fact which, if true, seems to be natural; and we may feel that we are dealing with phenomena akin to the influence of herbs, or specifics of any sort, or of magnetism and electricity. This is shown by the not very consistent accounts given of the cure of the woman with the issue of blood (Matt. ix. 20; Mark v. 25; Luke viii. 43). In this case, according to one version, Jesus knows not who has touched him, and becomes conscious of the fact that he has been touched only by experiencing a sense of loss of power. He is, further, obliged¹ to ask who it was that had touched him, in strange contrast with the preternatural knowledge which he had displayed on first seeing Nathanael, and in the conversation with the woman of Samaria. Nay, more, the moving cause in this case is not the will of Jesus, but the deed of the sick woman.

For reasons already many times repeated, we are not bound to examine this narrative historically, although the scrutiny would exhibit the same kind of difficulties which we find in other narratives of the like sort; but it is necessary to note the connexion of this story with sundry tales in the Acts of the Apostles, in which handkerchiefs and aprons, which had touched the body of the apostle Paul, heal sick persons, and that, too, at a distance. Hence, while in the gospels the touch of the clothes is effectual while they are worn by the person in whom the power is supposed to lie, in the Acts (xix. 12) they retain their influence long after they have been removed from the bodies of the apostles. Cardinal Newman might well say that such narratives are precisely parallel to a host of mediæval marvels which are not a whit less or more credible.

¹ If it be said that he knew, but that he went through the form of asking, this is to make him play a part, which seems more in accordance with the morality of the Johannine evangelist than with that of the Synoptic writers.

§ 8. *Cures wrought at a Distance.*

If in these stories we have an action as purely physical and involuntary as that of the flower when it emits its perfume, but depending at the same time on actual contact, we find other tales which represent Jesus as working cures at a distance by a mere act of the will or the expression of a supreme command. These two classes of legend altogether exclude each other. If the influence in the one class was so material that any one could extract it by a touch, we can scarcely suppose that it would be so spiritual as to be wafted by the will to any distance. If it was so, the limitations of the former hypothesis become inconceivable. The contradiction is thorough, and indicates at once that we are reading narratives which are not historical.

But these are not the only contradictions manifest on an analysis of these narratives. In Matthew (viii. 5) it is a centurion who, at Capernaum, prays Jesus to heal his servant, and, admitting himself to be unworthy to receive him under his roof, is praised as exhibiting a faith which Jesus had not found anywhere in Israel. The centurion, therefore, was a Gentile. In Luke (vii. 2) he does not go himself, but sends the elders of the Jews to Jesus, and makes them utter, in the form of a message, the words which the centurion in the first Gospel had spoken in person. In John (iv. 46) it is not a centurion, but a nobleman or officer of the royal household, and seemingly a Jew; and he finds Jesus, not at Capernaum, but at Cana. Far, however, from saying that he will come and heal his son, Jesus reproaches him for want of faith: 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.' On being told that his son should live, the man goes away, and ascertains on reaching home that the fever had left him at the very moment when Jesus had assured him of his recovery.

These contradictions are so great that many commentators have resorted to the usual device of asserting that these are narratives of three separate events; and thus, to save the consistency of the evangelists, we are called upon to believe that three persons

in Galilee had a son or servant sick, that in all three instances the sufferer was healed at a distance, that two of them declared their unworthiness in precisely the same words, and that Jesus praised their faith in precisely the same phrase. In truth, we need documentary evidence far more self-consistent than any to be found in the gospels, before we can be warranted in giving credence to so astonishing a recurrence of incidents. No valid reason, then, can be urged for regarding them as independent narratives; and as narratives of one and the same event they must from their self-contradictions be set aside as unhistorical.

It is possible, and perhaps not unlikely, that such stories may have been produced as complements to the legends in the Old Testament writings, which speak of prophets like Elisha curing lepers without coming into contact with them, and simply by making their recovery dependent on their complying with some definite condition. But the rejection of such a suggestion adds nothing to the historical credibility of self-contradictory narratives.

§ 9. *Cures wrought on the Sabbath-day.*

The stories of cures which, we are told, were wrought on the Sabbath-day, are noteworthy chiefly as indicating the position supposed to have been taken by Jesus in reference to the so-called Mosaic law.¹ Whether Old Testament tales furnished the starting-point for the seemingly higher marvels of the New, is a question which we are not called on to answer; but we may note the parallel between the withered arm of Jeroboam² and the withered hand of the man healed on the Sabbath-day (Matt. xii. 10).

The most remarkable of these cures is the one wrought on the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda. This incident has been already noticed; but we may fairly add the expression of our wonder that an institution like that of the pool, with its periodical angelic disturbances, should be unknown not only to Josephus, but to all the other evangelists. The authority of the fourth

¹ See p. 257.

² 1 Kings xiii. 4.

Gospel must be indeed transcendent, if it can bear the strain put upon it by countless improbabilities and contradictions.

Thus far we have dealt with a number of narratives, all recording preternatural or marvellous or prodigious incidents; but in every one of them we have, in the subjects of the wonder, at least the power of experiencing sensations and receiving impressions. The nervous organisation of the leper, the deaf, the blind, the dumb, though more or less diseased or defective, still remained a living system, capable in whatever measure of being acted on by external forces. On a further scrutiny we found that, of the maladies alleged to have been cured by Jesus, some were entirely nervous; and in these it may be either possible or likely that a sudden cure might be effected through the excitement or enthusiasm provoked by the glance and voice of a dearly-loved or venerated teacher. Others, again, there are, which we saw to be removed altogether from the province of the imagination. No effort of the mind or will could, it was evident, suddenly remove diseases which lay in a vitiated state of the bodily fluids, or in the total absence of certain organs, as in cases of congenital blindness or deafness. That any cures of the latter class were ever effected, we have no historical evidence whatever. That some cures (whether permanent or temporary) belonging to the former class may have been wrought through the medium of an intense emotion, it would be rash to deny, although we have but slight warrant for affirming the facts positively. All that can be said is that such incidents do not lie beyond the range of human experience, and that the narratives of the New Testament writings must, like all others, have some nucleus, whether historical or mythical, round which they have grown.

§ 10. *The Resuscitation of the Physically Dead.*

When we come to narratives recording the reanimation of dead bodies, we come to stories of quite another class. Here the dead body is, by universal admission, a mass of inert matter which can

no longer answer to any except chemical influences. It can no longer feel the touch, or hear the voice of him who is to work the wonder. Hence we are compelled to scrutinise the evidence for such alleged events far more strictly than that which is afforded for any other stories of marvels; and unless we find the evidence far more conclusive, we must reject them as un-historical.

If the resuscitation of the physically dead be, as it is often said to be, the most marvellous and the most conclusive token of a divine mission, then it is precisely that exhibition which, we might suppose, would be most frequently vouchsafed. It is strange, therefore, that at the utmost three only should be ascribed to Jesus, that of these one only should be common to the three Synoptic Gospels, and that one should be narrated only in Luke, and the third only in John.

With the first (Matt. ix. 18-26; Mark v. 22-42; Luke viii. 41-56) the narrative of the woman with the issue of blood is interwoven in all the three Synoptics; hence they must all be taken as relating one and the same incident. But the story is not without its inconsistencies. In Matthew the sufferer is the daughter of a certain ruler, and the fame of the wonder goes abroad throughout the land. In Mark the ruler's name is given as Iaeiros; but when the healing is effected, Jesus charges them straitly that no man should know it, although a crowd surrounded the house. But is this tale a story of the bringing back to life of one who was physically dead? The evangelists clearly were convinced that it was such, and they speak of the ruler, of his servants, of the family, and of the hired mourners, as also not less convinced of the death. On the other hand, in each of the three versions, Jesus is represented as persistently declaring, in spite of the scornful laughter of the bystanders, that the maiden was not dead but only sleeping—in other words, that it was a case of swoon. As elsewhere, so here, we can come to no definite conclusion. If we accept the words ascribed to Jesus as historical, the question is set at rest, and this narrative cannot be regarded as

one of the reanimation of a dead body. If so, the number of such tales is reduced to two.

Of these two, one is the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Luke vii. 11-15). Of this incident there is little to be said. In this case we have no prayer from the mourners. The wonder is the result purely of the pity and compassion of Jesus, who goes to the bier and takes the young man by the hand. Here, according to the story, there could be no doubt of the death as having taken place some hours at least before the corpse was carried out to burial. A still longer interval is placed between the death and the resuscitation in that story of Lazarus which furnishes the turning-point for the historical truth or worthlessness of the Johannine Gospel. It is patent on the face of this narrative that Lazarus is described first as dying, then as dead; that Jesus delayed to go to him precisely because he intended to restore him to life, and that he expresses, or is understood to express, this intention, as soon as he sees the sisters. As to this there can be no question; and there is, therefore, no room for what are called naturalistic explanations. The notion that Lazarus had been four days in a swoon, out of which he happened to wake precisely at the moment when Jesus commanded the door of the tomb to be opened, and that Jesus, happening to see that he was alive, called out to him to come forth, only shows how readily conservative championship runs into profaneness. Taken strictly, and without reference to the intentions of those who propound it, this explanation covers Jesus with infamy, and must be rejected with indignation and abhorrence. Because we wish to show that, in some paltry measure, the narrative is historical, we are, forsooth, to paint Jesus as a solemn deceiver, who arrogates to himself a divine power, while he knows that what had taken place was the result simply of accident.

With regard to these instances of resuscitation, we may ask why the persons raised should be so insignificant, and why, after their restoration to life, they should never be heard of again? How comes it that no one has been raised, who, in his previous

life, had done something to make him known? Is it because it was manifest to those who pretend to record such events, that Sokrates or Isaiah, if raised again, must say or do something in accordance with their former character, and that hence it became more convenient to limit these wonders to persons about whom no such annoying difficulties could arise? The issue is plainly this. If we put aside the story of the daughter of Jairo, there are two instances in our four Gospels which undoubtedly profess to be records of the resuscitation of dead bodies. If there be one thing above another as to which men in general long for more light and more knowledge, it is the future or the unseen life with its conditions. If we could be told that Bishop Butler or Cardinal Newman had returned to us from the dead, and were sojourning again in Oxford or in Rome, can we suppose for a moment that they would not be besieged by crowds eager to learn their experiences in the world which we all have to enter? Would not they, in their turn, long to enlighten us on matters as to which our senses and the instruments of our thought may woefully deceive us? Would they have nothing to say, and would those who saw them have nothing to ask, about those things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived, but which God, we are assured, has prepared for them that love him? Instead of this we have nothing but silence. The son of the widow of Nain never speaks. Lazarus, who is mentioned as again present at meals, is dumb. No questions seemingly are put to either; and the only feeling which the resuscitation of Lazarus rouses in the chief priests and their adherents is a desire to put him to death again along with Jesus. The experience of four minutes in the spiritual world would, we might suppose, be eagerly received and carefully weighed. Lazarus had the experience of four days, and he utters not one word even to him who had called him back to this earthly life. So it is with Jesus himself. If the eyes of traditionalists generally were not as heavily holden as those of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 16), they would see how astonishingly scanty are the utterances which are put into

his mouth after his alleged bodily resurrection. A few expressions (these being chiefly repetitions of words spoken or commands given during his ministry, and amounting to about ten or twelve lines in all) are the sum of his intercourse with his disciples during the so-called great forty days; and of these utterances not one breathes so much as a hint as to any of the conditions of the life to come.

In the special instance of Lazarus the peculiar attitude attributed to Jesus has excited no little discussion; and the perplexity caused by it is certainly not surprising. According to the story, Jesus, of set purpose, allows Lazarus to die in order that the sight of his resurrection might insure a more general faith in his own mission, while in the prayer which he offers up near the grave he plainly states that he prays solely on account of the bystanders, not his own. Nor is this all. The disciples had long been familiar with the figurative mode of speech employed by the Master. Yet when he tells them that their friend Lazarus sleeps, they immediately misunderstand him, after the fashion of the Jews, of Nicodemus, and the woman of Sychar. The Johannine evangelist could not forego the opportunity of pointing one of his favourite contrasts.

It must, further, be admitted that either this evangelist knows nothing of the resuscitations (if there be more than one) recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, or he is careful not to write as though he had heard of them. All that he makes the Jews ask (xi. 37) is, 'Could not he who gave sight to the blind have prevented this man's death?' If he had known of the raising (if it be such) of Iaeiros' daughter or of the widow's son, must he not have made them say, 'Why does not he who has already raised the dead restore his friend to life?' These events, we are told, were bruited abroad through Galilee and Judæa and all the country round about; and no dwellers at Jerusalem could plead ignorance of them. But this silence on the writer's part, and this question said to be asked by the Jews, imply that the fourth evangelist knew nothing of them; and the inference is that the one set of

narratives is unhistorical, or that the narrative in the fourth Gospel is a fiction.

But if it be strange that Matthew and Mark should know nothing of the raising of the widow's son at Nain, it is inconceivable that the raising of Lazarus, if true, should not have been known to the Synoptics. It is the most dramatic of the miracles attributed to Jesus, and, more particularly, it is represented as the point on which the subsequent catastrophe is said to have turned.¹ It was this which brought about, we are told, the secret meeting of the Sanhedrim, and led to the supposed saying of Caiaphas that one man (namely, Jesus, according to the fourth evangelist) must die for the benefit of the nation. It was this, we are told, which led them to plot or scheme for his apprehension, and to plan also the destruction of Lazarus—a result intelligible on the hypothesis that they disbelieved the story of his resurrection, but astounding, indeed, when we see that, according to the tale, Caiaphas and the rest believed it absolutely.

How, then, are we to account for the ignorance shown by the Synoptics of an event which, as exciting such indignation, must have been more talked of and more generally known than any other in the whole career of Jesus? The task might well appear hopeless; but it has been attempted, and the result is a laughable failure. By one we are told that they said nothing about it because the event was too well known to every one to need any record—an argument which would have furnished to the evangelist an excellent justification for saying nothing about the crucifixion as being an incident too notorious to need comment. By another we are told that they pass it in silence, as not wishing to bring Lazarus into trouble; but such advocates forget that the gospels were not, on any hypothesis, written within a few weeks or a few months after his resurrection, when alone there would be any risk of persecution; that, if they had been then written, this would be no reason for suppressing a narrative, for the truth of which Lazarus ought to have been glad, if need were, to bear

¹ See, further, *Supernatural Religion*, ii. 461, *et seq.*

testimony and to suffer; and, thirdly, that the event was, on any showing, so well known at the time that the risk to Lazarus could not be increased by publishing a narrative of it. Nor can it be urged that the Synoptic writers, being Galilæans, would not be likely to hear of it, for the notion is in itself absurd, and we are expressly assured that all the apostles were with Jesus at the time.

The silence of the Synoptics, therefore, implies their ignorance, and their ignorance is proof conclusive that the event never occurred. The resuscitation of Lazarus must thus be dismissed as being entirely unhistorical, and as having not the slightest foundation in fact. There is, therefore, no evidence whatever that Jesus ever raised the physically dead.

Whether any traditional basis can be found for the story is a question which we are in no way called upon to answer. Yet it may be worth while to remark, again, that the raising of the physically dead formed part of the popular notions respecting the Messiah, and that this power is ascribed in the Old Testament writings to Elijah and Elisha. The raising of Lazarus may seem to exceed in degree the wonders wrought by these prophets in their lifetime; but then we have already seen that the wonders of the fourth Gospel present a climax ascending above those in the other three, and that the resuscitation of the dead Moabite merely on touching the bones of Elisha, is, if impossibilities can admit of degrees, even more astounding than that of Lazarus. It is quite possible, therefore, that such narratives may have given rise to those of the New Testament scriptures; but whether this was so or not, the latter remain unhistorical.

§ 11. *Wonders or Miracles connected with the Sea.*

The rejection of the narratives which record the resuscitation of dead bodies renders it almost a superfluous task to examine the narratives of wonders connected with the sea. In one sense they seem to rise above those already noticed, for they exhibit Jesus as able to act, not only on the human mind or on irrational beings,

but even on inanimate nature. But it must not be forgotten that they are in no way necessary to the history, and can have no claim to acceptance as surviving in self-contradictory and irreconcilable documents. In themselves, as relating to operations on inanimate things, they are not wonders or miracles in the sense for which even the conservative schools now show a preference. They are mere prodigies, like those of the Arabian Nights' fiction, which Dr. Newman¹ sometimes wished might be true.

Of these wonders, one is the sudden stilling of a storm by the word of Jesus. It is impossible not to be reminded of the rebuking of the Red Sea, the very phrase which reappears in the rebuking of the waters of Gennesareth. But even if the two be not connected together, nothing is gained for the New Testament wonder.

The story of Jesus walking on the sea (Matt. xiv. 25) exhibits his body as exempt from the operation of the law of gravitation. Far from sinking into the water, his feet do not even dip beneath the surface, and he walks as on dry ground. Either, then, the body of Jesus was, as Doketics asserted, a phantom, and in this case he was no true man, or he had the power of altering at will the specific gravity of his body; and not only this, but he could suspend the operation of this law in the bodies of other men as well as in his own, for Peter is bidden to come to him on the water, and does so walk until his faith fails him. Whence the conclusion seems to be that faith may alter the specific gravity of human bodies. That this power was exercised by Jesus only at will, must be conceded, because at his baptism he was submerged in the water as much as any who were baptized by John. Either, then, the action was arbitrary; or, subsequently to his baptism, he acquired a power which he did not then possess. These are but a few of the absurdities which are involved in an acceptance of this narrative as historical. We have seen that there is no reason for so accepting it; and here, too, as elsewhere, we may refer to narratives in the Old Testament writings, which may

¹ *Apologia pro vita sua*, p. 56.

possibly have furnished the germs for such tales. Elijah does not indeed walk on the water, but he divides Jordan with his robe, and passes through it dryshod with his disciple Elisha. He also makes an iron axe-head swim, thus directly overcoming its specific weight. But, in the Herodian age, stories of this kind were multiplied over the whole Roman world. The parallelism of such wonders with the stories of the Hyperborean Abaris, of Perseus, and Achilles, may be taken for what it is worth; but its rejection proves nothing for the historical truth of the narratives in question. The story reappears, apparently, in a modified form in the last chapter (or appendix) of the fourth Gospel. In both, Jesus appears early in the morning. In the former tale the disciples take him for a spirit; in the latter they are afraid to ask who he is; and in both, so soon as Jesus makes himself known, Peter hastens to join him by casting himself into the water.

The next narrative relating to the sea is that of the tribute-money, which is found in the mouth of the fish (Matt. xvii. 27). The story is undoubtedly put forth as a marvel. The money is to be found, not like the ring of Polykrates¹ in the body of the fish, but in its mouth, and the fish is to come up as soon as Peter puts his fish-hook into the water. All attempts to regard this as a natural occurrence lead commentators into a perfect bog of absurdities. Such writers, naturally perplexed by the retention of the money in the mouth of the fish even while it snapped at the hook, venture desperately on the assertion that Jesus told Peter to go and sell the fish, for which he should receive (find) a statêr. It is enough to reply that the evangelist represents the piece of money as found, not in the market-place, but in the fish's mouth.

§ 12. *Marvels or Miracles of Multiplication.*

The marvellous feedings of the multitudes involve difficulties of another kind. If we follow the Synoptics, there are two such incidents, each differing slightly in the number fed and in the

¹ *Herod.* iii. 42.

amount of food which furnished the basis of the meal, but resembling each other in all other respects. They both occur in a lonely place not far from the sea of Galilee. The motive which animates Jesus is, in each case, compassion for the crowd which had lingered too long with him. Each time he wishes to feed the people from his own stores; each time the disciples object that this is impossible; each time the food forthcoming is bread and fish; each time Jesus disregards the unbelieving objection of his followers; and, each time, the fragments exceed in quantity the food originally provided. Events do not thus repeat themselves in their minutest features; and hence, in all likelihood, the two narratives have grown out of one by a process which we can see at work in the reports of the parables.¹ In any case, if the disciples had seen one marvellous feeding, it is impossible that they could have expressed unbelief when a second became necessary; rather, they must have entreated him to do again that which he had already shown himself able to do, and had done. The whole story is, therefore, unhistorical.

We are not, then, called on to discuss the other difficulties involved in it, although these are of an appalling kind. The number fed is in itself incomprehensible. In Matthew (xiv. 21) they are said to be about five thousand, besides women and children (we may, perhaps, say six thousand); and these are all fed seemingly by the twelve disciples or apostles. Is it possible that any such body of followers could suffice for such distribution? and how long would the distribution last? But, in all probability, not one of those who profess to believe this marvel are aware of the propositions to which that belief commits them. For we have here no instance of the acceleration of a natural process. Jesus does not take corn and make it grow and ripen in a moment. He does not take the ova from fish and make them develop instantaneously into their full growth. He does far more. He takes bread, an artificial substance, and fish which has undergone the artificial process of cooking, and in both of which all capacity for

¹ See p. 265.

reproduction has been destroyed. The work said to have been wrought by him seems, therefore, to be nothing less than this : (1) he converts the baked flour into corn, and then sums up in a single moment the several processes of sowing, growth, reaping, grinding, and baking ; and (2) he changes the cooked fish into a raw one, and then, having endowed the raw fish with life, consummates invisibly the expulsion of ova and their developement to maturity, together with the process of cooking the raw fish. Will the most vehement believers in these narratives of marvels assert plainly that they accept all this ? If they will not, then seemingly we resolve the marvel into a mere piece of magic by implying that what was given to the multitude was neither bread nor fish, but something which looked like them.

The shifts to which apologists are driven, who seek to explain the incident as a natural occurrence, are scarcely less pitiable than those which have been already noticed in the story of the tribute money. Jesus, we are told, commanded his disciples to produce their provisions, and his beneficent example led others to bring forth their hidden hoards, enough being thus provided not only for those who had brought food, but for those who had not done so. However this may be, it is certainly not the story of any of the gospels, which all say most distinctly that the five loaves and the two fishes were divided among the multitudes. Whatever be the shortcomings of the evangelists, we cannot fairly charge them with representing as marvels incidents which they did not regard as such ; and, still less, with exhibiting the great Teacher as insisting on the marvellous or extraordinary character of the event.

That such wonders would be attributed to Jesus, whether they occurred or not, may with tolerable safety be maintained. Dr. Milman¹ cites the rabbinical belief that, in the days of Messiah, Israel shall sit down and eat in the garden of Eden, and satiate themselves all the days of the world. This belief is, of course, founded on the traditions which told of manna and quails as bestowed on the hungry multitude ; and it must further be

¹ *History of Christianity*, vol. i. chap. 5.

admitted that to these traditions the gospel narratives furnish a close parallel. In both, the crowds are fed in the wilderness; in both, there are murmurs of unbelief as to the possibility of providing the food. In the former, Yahveh, in the latter, Jesus, disregards their objection, and Moses is bidden to announce the coming food to the people, just as the disciples are commanded to distribute the loaves and fishes.

In the so-called Mosaic narrative, the food is brought, not multiplied; but the miraculous increase in bulk of food already furnished is found in the story of the woman of Zarephath,¹ and of the feeding of a hundred prophets by Elisha with twenty loaves.² In this instance Elisha's servant gives utterance to precisely the same objection which is urged by the disciples of Jesus. According to Jewish legend this power of multiplication was a prerogative of good men. So great, we are told, was the blessing shed on the two Pentecostal loaves and the ten loaves of showbread in the days of Symeon the righteous, that all the priests ate as much as they desired, and left fragments remaining. To many these earlier legends may appear to furnish a sufficient basis for similar narratives in the gospels. Whether they do so or not, is a matter with which we are not concerned; but the rejection of this hypothesis leaves the later narratives where they were—unhistorical throughout.

The wonder wrought at the marriage feast in Cana is certainly not less inconceivable than the prodigious feeding of the multitudes. When we are carried away to strange regions, in which no object bears lineaments with which we are familiar in our ordinary world, where time and space, and cause and effect, seem to be entirely dispensed with, and where, consequently, there is no room for the proper exercise of our mental powers, we can but register the several mysterious and incomprehensible things brought to our notice, and say that in the one case there may be a hundred, in the other perhaps a thousand things, which we cannot comprehend. It matters little what the wonders may be. If we believe that

¹ 1 Kings xvii.

² 2 Kings iv.

napkins may be invested with a healing power, and the physically dead be recalled to this earthly life, there is seemingly no reason why we should stumble at the circumstance that water not frozen may present a surface capable of supporting the body of the wonder-worker, or that the latter should be able at will to render his body lighter than water—no reason why we should not think that, in the twinkling of an eye, cooked fish, first becoming raw, may be restored to life, may expel ova, and these ova be brought to maturity, and the fishes be cooked and ready for eating.

So here we have to notice, first, that this is one of the many marvels known only to the writer of the fourth Gospel, and that it occurs at a time during which the Synoptics describe Jesus as withstanding the tryings of the devil alone in the wilderness.¹ In the Johannine Gospel the feast at Cana takes place five days after the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, on the banks of Jordan. The two accounts cannot by possibility be true, while both may be false; but the writer of the fourth Gospel has nowhere established a claim to be accepted as the more credible narrator. Further, this incident is described in the fourth Gospel as the beginning of the wonders of Jesus. In the Synoptics the first recorded miracle takes place at Capernaum (Matt. viii. 5), and belongs to a different class of wonders.

The part taken by Mary in the matter is almost as mysterious as the other incidents of the story. According to the evangelist she went to the feast, perfectly aware that her son would perform this miracle. Even this is astonishing enough. So far as we can ascertain from the previous history, she seems to have forgotten with singular rapidity each marvellous occurrence in the great series of wonders which followed the annunciation. On this astounding forgetfulness I have already had to insist more than once.² But we have further seen that the kinsfolk of Jesus regarded him as 'beside himself,'³ and wished to put him under restraint; and we saw that this intimation appears in close connexion with the story of the repulse of his mother and brethren

¹ See p. 227.

² See pp. 187, 194, 206.

³ See p. 294 *et seq.*

when they send a message that they wish to see him.¹ The inference seems to be that at that time she had no faith in his mission. Nor is there anything in the Synoptic Gospels which is inconsistent with such a conclusion. These gospels, therefore, are in direct contradiction with the chapter in the fourth Gospel which asserts that she came to the marriage expecting her son to perform some marvel.

But although faith in his mission might convince her of his power to work wonders even at a time when he had not yet wrought any, it could not possibly teach her beforehand that a wonder would be needed at this particular feast; and hence the narrative ascribes to Mary a preternatural or superhuman prescience. She is, in fact, made to foresee that on this day he would work his first wonder, that he would need the help of the servants in the doing of it, and also that the guests would drink so much wine as to exhaust the whole store of the entertainer, and render a further supply necessary.

To escape this staggering difficulty some have even ventured to assert that Jesus had imparted to her beforehand his intention to work this miracle; but they have done so only to plunge from one morass into another. That Jesus should foreknow the excessive drinking of the guests is in harmony with the spirit of other statements in the fourth Gospel; but the assertion that he imparted this foreknowledge to his mother, converts the whole scene at the marriage into a comedy. The retort of Jesus to Mary in the fourth verse becomes thus a mere pretence; and Mary, in the next verse, merely obeys instructions already received. If, on the other hand, we suppose that, without expecting any wonder, she only prayed for her son's advice, her command to the servants becomes utterly unintelligible. Hence we are thrown back on the conclusion which the evangelist clearly designed to inforce, that Mary foreknew the performance of the first miracle of Jesus on that day.

Thus the time and place of this event, and the part which Mary plays in it, are of themselves enough to warrant a rejection

¹ See p. 296.

of the story as unhistorical. We are not, therefore, called on to discuss the scientific difficulties of the narrative. Yet we may note that, whereas, in the feeding of the multitudes Jesus multiplied substances without changing their quality, here there is a complete change of quality by the conversion of water into wine. To reach this end, not only the growth of the vine from the grape-seed and the immediate ripening of the fruit are necessary, but the operations of the wine-press and the process of fermentation must be invisibly superadded, and the result instantaneously attained.¹

To these difficulties, bewildering as they are, must be added others of a moral kind. All the other wonders of Jesus (with one exception presently to be noticed) are wrought for a beneficent end, which may subserve the spiritual interests of the recipients or the witnesses. Here no poverty is lessened, and no sickness removed. All that is done is to minister to a pleasure which cannot be said to be necessary, and thus to work a miracle of luxury, which in the narrative of the temptation (Matt. iv. 4) he distinctly refuses to do. Nor is the quantity of wine supplied less surprising. The measure translated by the word *firkin* contained somewhat more than thirty pints; and thus the six stone water-pots, containing two or three such firkins, would hold not less than 135 gallons; and the servants filled them up to the brim. What must be the effect of such a supply at a time when the guests are described as having already received more perhaps than a fair share of wine?

Lastly, it is not easy to understand the reproof addressed to Mary. To the words by which it is conveyed Jesus immediately adds a practical contradiction; for the directions to the servants, given almost in the same breath, show that his time had come, or that she had anticipated it at the utmost only by a few moments. In every part, therefore, this narrative is self-contradictory and impossible; and the subterfuges employed by some who wish to prove its possibility might rouse our indignation, if they were not deserving rather of contemptuous pity. Such writers have resolved the whole affair into a joke playfully palmed off by Jesus

¹ See Appendix B.

on the guests, in order to show that, even in its lighter aspects, he shared the feelings of our common humanity. According to this notable discovery, it seems that Jesus had brought the wine to the feast, and reproved Mary for spoiling his jest through over-haste; that he asked the servants to fill the vessels with water in order to make the guests believe that the water had been changed into wine; and that the wine was meanwhile brought in to the guests, who were too much intoxicated to perceive the trick which had been played on them. Probably, in all the chronicles of profanity, few more mournful absurdities could be pointed out. Jesus, then, allows his host, the guests, the servants, and his disciples to remain under the impression that he had performed a stupendous miracle, he alone with his mother being conscious that it had been only a merry jest. Nay, the evangelist was not less cheated than the disciples, for he too speaks of it as a marvel, and refers again (iv. 46) to Cana as a place, not where Jesus had played off a joke, but where he had turned the water into wine. Thus the attempt to account for the occurrence as a natural event issues simply in exhibiting Jesus as a hypocrite. The narrative must, therefore, be regarded as one of marvel or miracle; and if, on account of historical and other contradictions, the rejection of the story calls into question the veracity of Christian tradition, still no defiling touch is laid on the character of the great Master.

With the origination of the story we are not concerned. Yet the transformation in the tale exhibits an affinity to the older traditions which speak of Moses as bringing water from the rock, as turning the river of Mizraim into blood, and as making the bitter waters sweet. The same power is ascribed also to Elisha; it must, therefore, be attributed in more ample measure to the Messiah. But whether there be, or be not, a connexion between these several traditions, the narrative of the miracle of Cana still remains untrustworthy and unhistorical, while the ignorance which the Synoptic writers show of such a miracle wrought in Galilee seems to warrant the conclusion that the story was fabricated by the evangelist who has evoked Nicodemus, Lazarus,

and the Samaritan woman from the resources of his imagination.

§ 13. *The Punitive Marvel of the Fig-tree.*

The cursing of the barren fig-tree stands by itself as the only punitive miracle ascribed to Jesus in our canonical Gospels, unless the marvel with the swine at Gadara should also be regarded as of this nature. As such, it has caused very serious perplexity even to those who are anxious to believe without questioning. Here, as elsewhere, all so-called natural explanations are useless. The withering of the tree is traced immediately to an influence which passed over it from Jesus, who (Matt. xxi. 21) is said to speak to the disciples of the result as a *thing done* to the fig-tree—words which could not have been used if a mere natural decay was alone to be indicated. The same conviction is expressed by the words put into the mouth of Peter, ‘Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.’ Had the effect been purely natural, Jesus must have been represented as correcting the erroneous impression on the mind of his disciples.

With the metaphysical difficulties of the subject we have no concern. That Jesus should appear to pass judgement on an inanimate object, applied to which the words ‘punishment’ and ‘retribution’ have no meaning—still more, that he should exhibit anger with a lifeless tree, and indulge it to the destruction of the tree—may be, and doubtless is, bewildering, if not inconceivable. Hence we need not dwell on the further difficulties connected with the time for gathering figs, or the weather of that particular season in which the incident is said to have taken place, or the temporary or permanent barrenness of the fig-tree.

The difficulty on which we have to lay stress is strictly historical. When the people of a certain Samaritan town refused to receive Jesus, some of the disciples are said to have asked him, ‘Master, wilt thou that we call down fire from heaven upon them, as Elias did?’ (Luke ix. 55). The reply of Jesus, that they knew

not what manner of spirit they were of, is an emphatic protest against the idea that preternatural power might be exercised for the gratification of resentment and ill-will. Yet the narrative ascribes to him precisely such an exercise of arbitrary power. So again, if the evangelist (Matt. xii. 20) was right in applying to him the phrase, 'He shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,' Jesus should have been represented as healing the fig-tree rather than smiting it with a curse. Hence some who have felt the force of this difficulty have urged that the marvel had no moral reference to the fig-tree, and that it was simply a symbolical action to impress on the disciples' mind the lesson that 'every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' It is strange that such an outward token should be needed by them towards the close of the ministry; and if it were needed, we might suppose that it would be needed every day. But, in the first place, the evangelists nowhere state that it was a symbolical action, while the second Gospel assigns for the disappointment of Jesus the fact that it was not yet the time for figs—a reason which should have disarmed his anger against the tree; and, further, the remarks which Jesus is said to make immediately after the event have no reference to this supposed symbolical character of the act, but treat entirely of the power of faith which shall enable the disciples to *do* more than Jesus had *done* to the fig-tree.

Hence, as this narrative ascribes to the great Master a spirit which is found nowhere else in our four Gospels (although it is especially prominent in some of the apocryphal Gospels), and as it cannot be made to fit in with other accounts of the teaching of Jesus, it must be set aside at once as altogether unhistorical.

For the origin of this tale some of the Fathers attempted to account by saying that the cursing of the fig-tree was simply the parable of the barren fig-tree, given in the third Gospel (xiii. 6), carried into action. Whether they were right or wrong, or how the story took its present shape, we are in no way bound to determine. All that we need say is that we have, first, the alleged

saying of John the Baptist respecting unfruitful trees, then the parable, and lastly the parable drawn out as a history. The general character of oral tradition renders it all but absolutely certain that the saying furnished the germ of the parable, and that the parable was crystallised in the history, and not that the history, being forgotten, dwindled into the parable, while the parable left its last faint trace in the saying.

§ 14. *The Transfiguration.*

In the fourth Gospel (i. 41) we are told that when Peter first appeared before Jesus, he stood before one of whom his own brother Andrew had expressly spoken to him as the Messiah; and thus, without going further, we learn not only that Peter from the first was fully informed of the office of Jesus, but that this knowledge was imparted to others also. Certain words, which seem to imply a power like that of second sight, convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the king of Israel (i. 49); while in words of which the meaning could not possibly be mistaken, the Baptist had proclaimed him to his disciples as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Nor can it be said that Jesus himself had treated the question as one not to be answered. Throughout the whole of the Johannine Gospel it cannot be regarded as a secret at all. Jesus speaks of himself to Nicodemus as one who came down from heaven (iii. 13); and if the phrases used here leave any room for doubt, the last uncertainty is removed when we find Jesus himself plainly telling the Samaritan woman that he is Messiah, the Christ. Nor was this knowledge confined to the woman. After a sojourn of Jesus in the city her fellow-townsmen avow openly their conviction that he is indeed the Christ, the healer of the world (iv. 42). Nor can it be said that Jesus imparted the secret of his mission to those only who would receive it with meekness, and in a spirit of ready faith. His claims are urged publicly in Jerusalem before multitudes who are said to be exasperated by phrases, which to them, we are told, appear simply

blasphemous. He is the bread of life (vi. 48); he has the power of raising all men up on the last day (vi. 44). His claims are generally known and freely discussed. Some said that he was the Christ; others scoffed at his Galilæan origin. The distinct assertion of his pre-existence before the days of Abraham impels the unbelieving Jews, it is said, to take up stones to stone him (viii. 58), and the same effect is produced by the declaration that Jesus and the Father are one (x. 30). Thus throughout the whole ministry of Jesus his Messianic character is set forth with the most uncompromising clearness; and yet Dr. Milman could gravely say that, almost to the end of his life, the knowledge of it was 'confined to the secret circle of his own more immediate adherents.'¹ Was it possible that it could be proclaimed more widely? It had been propounded not merely to individual men, as to Andrew, Peter, Nathanael, to the nameless or the loved disciple and to Nicodemus, but to the population of Samaritan cities, and the promiscuous crowds of worshippers at feasts in Jerusalem. Being thus proclaimed, it was, in fact, published to the whole world; for the Parthians and Medes and Elamites and others, who are mentioned as hearing the apostles speak in foreign dialects at the feast of Pentecost after the crucifixion, were like-

¹ *History of Christianity*, vol. i. chap. vi. I refer again, as I have so often referred before, to Dr. Milman's pages, as coming from one who was pre-eminently an honest and upright thinker. Yet for those who have at heart the real interests of historical truth, there must be something especially saddening in this portion of the narrative to which Dr. Milman gave the authority of his venerated name. Nor can this feeling of regret be lessened when we remember that this narrative is the work of one who told with consummate skill, judgement, and eloquence, the story of Gregory the Great and Hildebrand, of Berengar and Abelard. There is, indeed, a wide difference between the strong man free and the strong man fettered. In dealing with the pontiffs, monks, or kings of the middle ages, Dean Milman was under no unconscious obligation to tell the story in one particular way. In dealing with the alleged facts of the New Testament narratives he had to make it known that he regarded them as historically trustworthy, and that the history furnished by them was consistent and true. He could do this only by weaving together a coherent narrative, leaving out of sight all statements which clashed with, ignored, or excluded the statements approved by himself. The task was not a formidable one. It has been done many times on other materials; and the issue of such attempts is brought out with overwhelming force in Sir Cornewall Lewis's *Credibility of Early Roman History*.

wise present at Jerusalem when Jesus told them that Abraham rejoiced to see his day.

These are all diametrical contradictions on a vital point. Either the Messiahship of Jesus was proclaimed to Samaritans, Jews, and foreigners, or it was not. Either it was a secret imparted, even to the disciples, only at a late period of the ministry, or it was not. Dr. Milman, following the Synoptic Gospels, asserts that not one of the apostles knew or confessed Jesus to be the Messiah till the time immediately preceding the transfiguration; and thus he virtually sets aside the reiterated and solemn statements of the fourth Gospel as absolute falsehoods. This is the practical result. Of course, it cannot be said that Dr. Milman purposely did this. His object required him only to put together a coherent narrative; and, content with performing this task, he simply and summarily ignores all that is said in the fourth Gospel. But it cannot be ignored; and thus we are brought to the conclusion that, by the tacit admission of Dr. Milman, of the two gospel narratives, one, at least, is false, and that this false narrative must be a wilful fabrication. His condemnation of the fourth Gospel is, in short, decisive, for if the Messianic character of Jesus was kept profoundly secret till the eve of the transfiguration, it is untrue to say that it was made known not only to the Baptist, to Andrew, Peter, Nathanael, Nicodemus, but to the whole concourse of Jews and strangers, believers and scoffers, at the great festivals in Jerusalem. If, again, it was so widely revealed, the narrative which asserts that during the greater part of the ministry it was kept secret from all, must be set aside as in every particular untrustworthy. But Dr. Milman could scarcely avow in plain words his adoption of either alternative; and hence he is obliged to countenance the notion that he accepts two wholly contradictory narratives, while he virtually rejects one as false. This is the inevitable inference; and any one who questions this may, with equal logic, assert in the same breath that a triangle is a three-sided figure, and that it is a figure with four sides.

When we turn to the transfiguration itself, it is difficult, if not

impossible, to discover what Dr. Milman really thought of the event, or whether he cared to reach any clear conclusion in the matter. Yet nothing can be more certain than that the events either did or did not take place as they are recorded in the New Testament writings. If they did not, there is nothing more to be said than that the narrators are not to be trusted, and that all attempts to construct a correct account must be labour thrown away. The Synoptic Gospels make certain unequivocal statements; but we have no right to put them aside and to foist into their place certain other statements of our own. Dr. Milman is therefore not justified in saying that Moses and Elias '*seemed to pay homage to Jesus,*' or in treating the sounds heard at the close of the scene as *either* articulate utterances of the human voice *or* thunder, '*which appeared to give the divine assent to their own preconceived notions of the Messiah.*'¹ This is to treat the gospels as documents which may be made to bear any meaning at our will. But they do speak distinctly of an articulate utterance;² and if we choose to resolve this into the mutterings of thunder, we do not believe the Synoptic narratives, and it would be better at once to avow our disbelief. To leave it open to doubt '*whether the incidents of this majestic and mysterious scene were presented as dreams before their sleeping, or as visions before their waking senses,*' is really to pour contempt upon the gospel narratives. In the third Gospel only is any reference made to the sleep of the three disciples; but the evangelist adds expressly that not until they were thoroughly awake (ix. 32), did they see his glory and the two men standing with him. What, again, did Dr. Milman mean by a vision presented to their waking senses? If we are to understand by this an hallucination to which there is no corresponding reality, this is only to exhibit the apostles as deluded dreamers, fancying that they saw what in fact they did not see. But the Synoptics say clearly that they did see two men, and that these men were Moses and Elias.

With the same apparent unconsciousness that he was walking

¹ *History of Christianity*, vol. i. ch. vi.

² *φωνή* in all the three accounts.

in thorny paths, Dr. Milman spoke of the 'vision' as tending 'to elevate still higher their already exalted notions of their Master.' Here, again, we have the confusion between the two portraits given in the Synoptic and the Johannine narratives. According to the former, the disciples, generally, never had any exalted notions of the character of the Messiah. Down to the alleged moment of the ascension, and far later even than the supposed conversion of Cornelius, they give utterance only, or chiefly, to sensual and material ideas of the Christ and his office; nor does the transfiguration apparently tend to raise them into a more wholesome atmosphere. According to Dr. Milman himself, they have a marvellous power of forgetting whatever they see or hear. The words of Jesus, he says, 'appear to pass away and to leave no impression upon their minds,' and 'in a short time they are fiercely disputing among themselves their relative rank in the instantaneously expected kingdom of the Messiah.' Such admissions in reference to narratives which are manifestly self-contradictory, may fairly justify the suspicion that either the disputes did not take place because the teaching of Jesus had produced its proper effect, or that the words attributed to Jesus were not spoken by him, because his disciples exhibited so mean and earth-bound a spirit.

Nor does Dr. Milman take any notice of the fact that the conversation, which is said to have been held between Jesus and the disciples on their way down the mountain on which he had been transfigured, excludes the idea that any personal or bodily appearance of Elijah had taken place or was to be expected. But the flat contradiction thus immediately given to the historical character of the transfiguration itself, points unmistakeably to the existence of two different states of feeling among the early Christians, one demanding visible manifestations, the other contented with spiritual realities, just as the refusal of Jesus to perform wonders or give signs points to a different tradition from that which has multiplied narratives of marvels.

We are thus compelled to turn from Dr. Milman's pages to the

history of the transfiguration as given in the Synoptic Gospels; and we start with the important fact that, by his virtual admission, that narrative is throughout contradicted by statements which are interwoven with the whole fabric of the Johannine Gospel. Thus the thoroughly unhistorical character of that Gospel is more strikingly displayed, and we have only to see whether the Synoptic narrative be self-consistent or credible.

The existence of plan in the fourth Gospel is betrayed by the fact that the narrative of the transfiguration is not to be found in it. It was impossible for the evangelist to introduce histories which implied that the Messiahship of Jesus had been studiously kept secret, not only from the people at large, but from the disciples also. That he was induced to omit it from a reluctance to encourage the Doketic notions which were coming into vogue, and which treated Jesus as a phantom, cannot for a moment be admitted, for this Gospel contains the narrative of Jesus walking on the sea, which, more than all others, invests him with a Doketic character.¹

As little can it be thought (as many have supposed) that the Synoptic writers do not mean to relate the event as a wonder or marvel. The instances of so-called naturalistic interpretation already given have made us sufficiently familiar with a method which can make anything mean anything. Yet it is marvellous that men who do not wish to bring the gospels into contempt can turn the whole scene into an optical illusion, and gravely maintain that the three disciples, waking up from a heavy sleep, find a thunderstorm going on, and, seeing the form of Jesus revealed by a flash of lightning, fancy that his person and raiment are transfigured, and, in themselves, invested with a preternatural light; while they mistake for Moses and Elias two strangers, probably Essenes, who have come during the storm or the sleep of the disciples to converse with Jesus, and one of whom is so impressed

¹ There seems to be a strong presumption that the phrase ἐκρύβη (viii. 59) points to a like notion, and that the same idea is meant to be conveyed by the wording of Luke iv. 29.

by him as to say, when he takes his departure, 'This is the beloved Son, in whom God is well pleased.' These words, overheard through the mist by the scarcely-awakened disciples, sound in their ears as a voice from heaven.

A terrible penalty is paid for such attempts to bring incidents manifestly marvellous (if they ever occurred at all) within the range of events belonging to ordinary experience. The result is to make the disciples fools, and Jesus a knave. Can anything less be said, when three persons, half-stupified with sleep, will have it that two Essenes are Moses and Elias, and when Jesus treats what he knows to be the visit of two living men as a return of men who had been dead for centuries? 'Tell the vision to no man,' he says; and are we to suppose that such a thought would ever have entered into his mind, if all that he referred to was a conversation with two strangers who sought to speak with him on certain religious questions? If he did so speak of such an incident, he was aiding to keep up what he knew to be a delusion, and thus proving himself to be an impostor.

But such interpretations do violence to the plain words, as well as to the meaning, of the evangelists. It may be true that Luke alone speaks of the disciples as having slept; but none of them says a word about any thunderstorm, while Luke also asserts positively that they were thoroughly awake when they saw the two forms which stood on either side of Jesus; and all three state distinctly, not that the forms answered to the traditional representations or portraits of Moses and Elias, but that they actually were Moses and Elias themselves. Still less do they say that three different men had precisely the same dream at the same moment of time. If, again, these strangers, knowing the superstitious fanaticism of the disciples, enacted a farce which they knew that these disciples would take in solemn earnest, we can only say that greater rogues could not easily be found in any land. But surely it is enough not only that the disciples remain, according to the story, convinced of the actual apparition of Moses and Elias, but that Jesus himself shares their conviction, so far as the

narrative of the transfiguration is concerned; and hence we may dismiss that narrative as the record of a marvellous event in which Moses and Elijah are said to have borne a personal share.

The honesty of the writer who drew up the narrative is not necessarily called into question by the fact that the conversation immediately subsequent ignores that narrative altogether. The contradiction, fatal as it is to the hypothesis that we are dealing with genuine history, proves only that the two passages come to us from different sources. But it does reflect very seriously on the compiler of the fourth Gospel, if he be John the son of Zebedee, that he should make no mention of an event which he alone of the evangelists witnessed. The transfiguration is surely an incident of sufficient importance to call for a record from one whose memory must have retained many particulars which could scarcely be preserved in reports received at second hand.

The truth is that we have here another reason for concluding that no such incident as the transfiguration described by the Synoptics ever took place; and a further proof is furnished by the Synoptic writers themselves. No sooner, according to this account, do they descend the mountain than the disciples ask Jesus to explain why the Scribes assert that Elias must first come (Matt. xvii. 10; Mark ix. 11). Beyond all doubt, this question involves the fact that thus far Elias had *not* come in person as a forerunner and witness to the Messiah, and, therefore, it is absolutely impossible that they should have asked such a question a few minutes after they had actually seen him. Driven to desperation by this difficulty, some commentators ask us to believe that the disciples speak, not of the mere appearance of Elias, but of a great moral and spiritual reformation to be effected by that prophet, whereas the apparition on the mount had come and gone without leaving any effects behind it. This hypothesis, if it were allowed to pass, would only prove that the disciples were imbecile persons who could not put their thoughts into intelligible language, or, rather, who had no thoughts to put into words at all. For in this case they must have asked, not 'Why do the Scribes

say that Elias must come?' but 'Why do they say that he must first restore all things?' Yet on the latter point, which on this notion must have greatly perplexed them, they are silent; and they speak only about his coming, which, if they had just seen him, they must have known to be an accomplished fact. But not only do their words imply that Elias had not come, but the reply put into the mouth of Jesus asserts distinctly that he was not even coming, if his advent was to be regarded literally. 'Elias,' he told them, 'has come already in the person of the Baptist, and the Jews have done to him whatsoever they listed.'¹ It is impossible that Jesus should have converted into a metaphor an event which had only just occurred, or even one which had taken place at any time within his or their recollection; and if the ordinary conceptions about Jesus are to be retained, it is impossible that Elias should come at any later period, for as, according to the words assigned to Jesus himself, the Baptist was the promised Elias (Matt. xi. 14; Luke i. 17), Jesus would be mistaken if the Elijah who opposed Ahab should afterwards make his appearance.

Here, then, we have a narrative of alleged facts, followed by a conversation which ignores these facts and precludes their possibility, just as the declaration that no sign should be given to the evil and adulterous generation of the Jews runs counter to the idea of constant wonders or miracles wrought by Jesus. Of these passages the conversation is indubitably the earlier, and may be historical, while the narrative of the external transfiguration sprung up when the need of a literal interpretation of the words of Malachi began to be felt. It is, therefore, without the least historical basis.²

On this tradition, then, we are in no way bound to say anything more. It is no part of our task or our duty to explain how the narrative came into existence. We have shown it to be

¹ These words (Matt. xvii. 12) seem to point to a tradition different from that which made John end his days in prison by Herod's order. Jesus adds that the Jews would treat himself as they had treated John; but the Jews, as a people, had not, so far as we can see, lifted a finger against the Baptist.

² See Appendix A.

unhistorical, and it is unnecessary, therefore, to show further that it has no object and that it answers no purpose. We need not trouble ourselves to ask how, even if his countenance was suffused with an unearthly glory, his raiment also should undergo a like change. Yet these are difficulties which all who accept the narrative as fact are surely bound to meet. It is for them to explain why the vision should be vouchsafed to the three who were spiritually the strongest of the disciples, and sedulously kept secret from all the rest; or how such mere outward brightness could tend to the glorification of Jesus as much as the effulgence of his spiritual purity and the heavenly character of his acts and teaching.

It may be more or less likely that, apart from its mystical source, the germ of this tradition is to be sought in the earlier story told of Moses, whose face, after his descent from the mount, is said to have dazzled the eyes of all beholders;¹ as well as in the frequent comparison of righteous men to the sun when he goes forth in his might, or to the stars as they glisten in the firmament of heaven. The same thought may have laid the scene on a mountain, as Moses was transfigured on Sinai; and the idea of the three disciples chosen as witnesses may have been suggested by the special mention of Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu before the seventy elders.² The summons of Moses that he might worship may have led to the statement that Jesus went up into the mountain to pray, while the declaration with which the scene closes is in part a repetition of the words said to have been heard at his baptism, and partly a reference to the passage in which Moses is reported as exhorting his people to obey the prophet who should come after him.³

Whether this be the case or not, is a matter of very small importance. It is enough that we have analysed the narrative and found it to be in every particular unhistorical.

We have thus gone through all the classes into which the miracles and wonders of the gospel narratives may be distributed,

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 29.

² Exod. xxiv. 9.

³ Deut. xviii. 15.

and have examined the chief (in some cases, all) the instances of miracles and prodigies in each class. The analysis leaves no historical residuum, except (possibly) in some of the stories of sympathetic cures which, as we have seen, are placed by some of the most strenuous apologists in the class of miracles called ambiguous.¹ For the miracles or wonders belonging to any of the other classes we have no historical evidence whatever; and the frequency with which the narratives contradict themselves and each other on the most vital points, leads us to the definite conclusion that the alleged incidents never took place.

¹ See Appendix E.

BOOK IV
THE PASSION

CHAPTER I

CLOSING SCENES OF THE MINISTRY

WE have had to repeat more than once that over all the incidents of the birth, childhood, and youth of Jesus of Nazareth there rests an impenetrable veil. This veil seems to be lifted, when he enters on his ministry ; but it is astonishing to find it falling again, long before his public life is said to reach its close. After what may be called a brilliant morning, on which great works are undertaken and carried out successfully amidst expressions of thankful confidence and hope on the part of the people, the shadow of death seems to be thrown with startling suddenness across the scene. So far as the narratives take us, there is, historically, no reason for this bewildering change. Nothing had been said or done to warrant the expectation of such a catastrophe. Yet according to the Synoptic Gospels, as soon as Peter has expressed the clear conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the announcement is made of the events which are to bring his ministry to a close.

Nothing so far said or done seems to furnish an intelligible cause for the results. The whole is resolved into the single phrase, 'Thus it must be.' As it had been written, so must all things be done. There can be no escape and no divergence. It is a setting forth of minute particulars ; and even the minutest must not be

left out of sight. The scriptures must be fulfilled, although we are not told what these writings are. But there is to be a handing over to the Gentiles. There is to be insult, mockery, violence, and death, followed by an uprising on the third day. From a time which seems to mark something like the middle point of the ministry the declaration is manifestly made habitually, being introduced seemingly without any preface and without suggestion from any outward circumstances, and being followed by no comment beyond the expression of Peter's hope that such an end might never come, and the pathetic confession (Luke xviii. 34) that they understood none of these things, that the word was hidden from them, and that the whole announcement had for them no meaning. Their failure to understand was not from lack of plain speaking, for Jesus, we are told (Mark viii. 32), made the announcement with perfect clearness. But if words have any meaning, the evangelists assuredly say that the disciples felt themselves breathing an oppressive air to which they had never been accustomed, and which filled them with dismay. Jesus, it is said, went before them as a guide, and they followed in a state of astonishment and fear (Mark x. 31). They are even oppressed with this terror before Jesus recounts to them the details of the coming passion. The dominant idea throughout is that of inevitable and inexorable necessity,¹ which for the Greek was embodied in the stories of Sisypheus, Oedipus, and Ixion. We are trespassing here on the regions where the Mythos reigns supreme, and our task forbids our entering them. This inquiry is strictly historical; but the character of the nativity stories is impressed on those of the passion. We shall see that neither series stands on any solid basis of fact. The narratives are brought before us with the distinct claim that they are trustworthy as historical documents; and on this ground strictly must they be tested.

According to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus sets out from Galilee to keep his last passover in Jerusalem (Matt. xix. 1; Mark x. 1; Luke ix. 51); but although they agree in the points of departure

¹ See Appendix B.

and arrival, these gospels are not otherwise consistent. The statement in Matthew is almost unintelligible; but if we may receive the interpretation put upon it in the second Gospel, both Matthew and Mark may be taken to mean that Jesus found his way to Jerusalem from Galilee through Peræa or the country beyond Jordan—in other words, that he crossed the Jordan twice in the course of his journey. According to Luke, he never crossed the Jordan at all, for the writer of this gospel states distinctly twice that he reached Judæa through Samaria. It is true that his way of putting it (xvii. 11) is, that Jesus went through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, whereas, if he started from any place in Galilee, he must have journeyed first through the rest of Galilee before he could set foot on Samaritan ground; but both here and in ix. 51, he clearly asserts that Jesus kept the western side of Jordan. The very reason why the people of a certain Samaritan village would not receive him is that 'his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem'—an objection which could not have been taken if he had manifested only the intention of passing to the country on the other side of Jordan.

On the further difficulty that any Samaritans should decline to receive him after the conviction expressed by the citizens of Sychar (John iv. 42), we need lay but little stress. The narrative of the fourth Gospel implies that no inconsiderable body of the Samaritans had, almost from the beginning of the ministry, been convinced from personal experience that Jesus was indeed the Anointed, the Healer of the world; and it is quite impossible to suppose that this conviction could have been kept a secret from the other cities of that not extensive territory. Hence, in the disinclination shown by these Samaritans to receive Jesus on his last journey to Jerusalem, we find only another proof of the unhistorical character of the Johannine narrative. In plain truth, so utterly destitute is this fourth Gospel of all internal credibility, so completely is it at variance with the accounts given in the Synoptic Gospels, that we might be fairly justified in dismissing its version of the closing scenes in the ministry of Jesus without

further notice. According to this gospel, Jesus does not journey from Galilee to Jerusalem before the last festival, while his crucifixion takes place before the passover, which, according to the other gospels, he had already celebrated with his disciples on the eve of his sufferings. In the Johannine Gospel Jesus had quitted Galilee many months earlier (vii. 1-10); he had been present at Jerusalem at a passover (in the Synoptics his first passover after the beginning of his ministry was also his last); he was present at the ensuing feast of dedication (x. 22); and not a hint is given that in the interval he had been any further from the city than the Mount of Olives. After the latter feast he went into Peræa, or the country beyond Jordan, from which he returns to Bethany on hearing of the sickness and death of Lazarus. From Bethany he retires only to the city of Ephraim near the wilderness (xi. 54), and returning from Ephraim to Bethany (xii. 1), finally enters the holy city.

Thus we have another contradiction between the Johannine and the Synoptic narratives; for, whereas they bring Jesus to Jerusalem from Galilee, John carries him straight from Bethany to Jerusalem, while, in the other gospels, his road lies quite in another direction through Jericho. All attempts to reconcile these contradictions have been vain. It is useless to seek to extort from Luke (x. 38) an admission that Jesus was at Bethany, until we have shown that the fourth Gospel agrees throughout with the others. It is true that John speaks of Bethany as the city of Mary and Martha; but it is equally true that Luke makes no mention of Bethany, and speaks only of 'a certain village' where Martha received him into her house, while Mary sat at his feet and heard his words, and that he does not so much as name Lazarus as their brother.

Yet more, in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus passes in one day from Jericho to Jerusalem (Matt. xx. 34, xxi. 1). In the fourth Gospel he goes from Ephraim to Bethany, and on the following day makes the simple journey to Jerusalem (xii. 1, 12). Here, again, the contradiction is fatal. In the fourth Gospel Jesus sleeps at Bethany; in the Synoptics, 'as soon as he came near to

Bethphage and Bethany,' he does not take up his lodging for the night, but only sends his disciples for the ass on which he makes his triumphant entry into the city. On the supposition that he spent the night in Bethany the whole Synoptic narrative becomes unintelligible. That narrative distinctly states that the demand for the ass by the disciples in the name of the Master was followed by an instantaneous surrender on the part of the owners; and it is hard indeed to see why Jesus should thus send them to secure the ass some four-and-twenty hours before he needed it. But in truth there is no room for any such hypothesis. In the first three Gospels the charge to go for the ass is followed by immediate obedience, and the animal is at once brought, and Jesus is placed thereon. Then follows the narrative of the triumphant entry—a narrative which finds no place in the fourth Gospel. So according to Mark (xi. 11) Jesus enters Jerusalem late in the day or towards dusk, and has only time to give a hasty glance round the place before he goes to Bethany for the night—the reason being that the journey from Jericho had occupied the whole day. From Bethany, there was no reason why he should not have reached the city at a much earlier hour. But as though these contradictions were not enough, we are told in the first Gospel (xxi. 12, etc.) that from Jericho Jesus reached Jerusalem early enough in the day to purify the temple (an event which we have already seen to be altogether unhistorical),¹ to perform cures on the lame and blind, and to rebuke the Scribes and Pharisees who wished him to repress the acclamations of the little children.

To avoid this difficulty some have maintained that the evangelists speak of two entries; and we are at once driven to ask, How is it that John says nothing of the entrance mentioned by the Synoptics, and that the Synoptics say nothing of the entrance related by John? With the marvellous assurance which takes for granted that the evangelists related chiefly those events of which they were eye-witnesses, such interpreters tell us that John was not present at the first entrance, because he had been sent to

¹ See Book III. chapter ix. section iv.

Bethany to announce the coming of Jesus to that village. The Gospel says nothing of this, and we ask, Was Matthew sent anywhere, so that he was not present at the second entry? But is it credible that those who were present only at one entrance never heard a word spoken about the other? Still more, is it credible that on two successive days Jesus entered Jerusalem in precisely the same way, greeted by the same acclamations, and saluted by the same suspicious remarks of his enemies, and that on both occasions there stood an ass waiting for Jesus, the incidents attending this part of the scene being in both cases the same?

But, in truth, the fourth evangelist is clearly describing an entry which he regarded as the *first*. If Jesus had already been in Jerusalem on the previous day, it is impossible that the people could have gone out to meet him on the ground that as yet they had not seen him. Yet this is asserted in xii. 9, where they are said to come for the purpose of seeing both Jesus and Lazarus. Again, if the Synoptic entry had taken place on the day before that which is mentioned in the fourth Gospel, then the tidings that Jesus was at hand would be no news to the people, and would, in fact, be superfluous. But in xii. 12, the Johannine evangelist distinctly represents the tidings of the advent of Jesus as being brought to Jerusalem on the morning of the day on which he entered it from Bethany.

Clearly, then, the two accounts relate to one, and only one, entrance; and we have only to see how far they cohere with, or contradict, each other. Some points of discordance we have already noticed; but there are others which must not be passed by. The second and third Gospels speak of the animal on which Jesus rode as a colt on which no man had sat before. This particular, which is unknown to Matthew, at once introduces a difficulty. Animals which have never been ridden are always restive; and an unbroken colt ridden for the first time in a procession could not fail to disturb its order and seemliness. Hence, if the fact be true, we have to suppose that Jesus exercised a preternatural power to control the unruliness of the animal—an

assumption quite illegitimate, and not set down by the evangelist ; and thus we are driven to ascribe this expression to the feeling that Jesus should ride an animal never bestriden by man, just as his body should be placed in a grave in which no man had yet lain.

That the circumstances attending the finding of the ass do not belong to the range of ordinary events, it is almost superfluous to note. It is absurd to say that Jesus wished his disciples merely to get one of the many animals which stood ready to be hired, because these would all be beasts which had been broken in and ridden ; and, further, Jesus sends them not for some beast or other to be chosen by themselves, but for one particular animal, which they were to find in one particular spot, and which would be given up to them as soon as they said that it was needed by the Master.¹ But, further, the first Gospel speaks not merely about one animal which had never been ridden, but of an ass tied, and a colt with her, and represents the disciples as placing Jesus on *both* the beasts.² The English translators of the Authorised Version were evidently aware of this difficulty ; for, instead of honestly giving the plain English words 'upon them,' they, with a dexterity which is, to say the least, discreet, substitute the adverb 'thereon.' Further yet, the Synoptic evangelists represent the acclamations on the entry of Jesus as proceeding wholly from the multitude of persons journeying to Jerusalem for the feast. Nothing is said of any coming out of the city to meet Jesus. But in the fourth Gospel the greeting comes altogether from those who leave the city expressly to meet him, while his followers and attendants testify to the people of Jerusalem the resurrection of Lazarus—an event which we have already seen to be altogether unhistorical. All that we can say is that no trust can be placed in the Synoptic narratives of these events, while the narrative of the fourth Gospel betrays the deliberate twisting of materials to suit a special purpose.

¹ Matt. xxi. 2, 3.

² The translators of the Revised Version have not had the courage to treat the matter straightforwardly. But no evasion is possible. The words *ἐτάω αὐτῶν* may possibly be referred to the garments ; but the garments are put on *both* the animals, and Jesus sits on the garments spread over both. There is no practical difference. The ass and the colt are both under the same coverings.

CHAPTER II

PREDICTIONS OF JESUS RESPECTING HIS DEATH

IN all the Gospels Jesus is represented as predicting that his ministry would be brought to an abrupt end by a violent death. But here, as in almost all other instances, their agreement ends. In the Synoptic Gospels the announcements of his sufferings are not made till a comparatively late period of his ministry (Matt. xvi. 21); and when they are made, they are drawn out in minute detail. The death is to be violent (Matt. xvii. 12); it is to be preceded by a betrayal (22); he should be mocked, scourged, and crucified by the Gentiles (xx. 19); he should be buried (xxvi. 12), and rise again on the third day. That this description is meant by the evangelists to apply to bodily tortures and bodily death no one probably will call into question. Beyond all doubt, the Synoptic writers have no idea of inculcating the neo-Philonism which runs through the discourses of the Johannine Gospel. In these discourses the words 'death' and 'resurrection' mean, commonly, death to sin, and the uprising which follows it. 'He that keepeth my sayings shall never see death,' is a saying not designed to assert immunity from bodily or physical death for those who love God.

But, nevertheless, in the fourth Gospel, just as the Messiahship of Jesus is proclaimed to the disciples, Samaritans, Jews, and foreigners throughout the whole of his ministry, so predictions of his death are scattered through the whole narrative, beginning with the purification of the temple (John ii. 13) and the conversa-

tion held with the Pharisee Nicodemus. But they nowhere descend to the details of the Synoptics, and are couched for the most part in ambiguous language. In the Synoptics, the disciples seem to receive from his words an indistinct impression of coming disaster; in the Gospel of John no one seems to attach any meaning to them. By an equivocal play on the word 'temple,' Jesus is described as predicting the death and resurrection of his body (John ii. 21) after the alleged first purifying of the holy place; but the significance of the phrase was, we are told, lost on the disciples until after he was risen from the dead. Even less does Nicodemus understand the announcement that the Son of Man¹ must be 'lifted up,' as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Nor are these predictions made only in the ears of the well-disposed like Nicodemus; they are published before the mingled concourse of friends and foes. The general throng of worshippers hear the words in which Jesus compares himself to the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep, and declares that of his own will he lays down a life which no one can take from him, and which by his own will he again takes up (x. 14-18).

Now, either Jesus predicted his sufferings and death from the beginning of his ministry, or he did not. Either he entered into the details of the closing scene, or he did not. Either he kept them secret from his disciples, or he did not. Either he proclaimed them before his enemies, or he did not. Either he used ambiguous phrases, or he did not. Either he expressed himself in unequivocal language, or he did not. He cannot possibly have done both the one and the other. Yet the Synoptics represent him as doing the one, the Johannine Gospel as doing the other. Here, then, we

¹ The matter is of the slightest possible importance; but the expression *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* can be legitimately rendered only by 'the Son of the Man.' The distinctively Messianic meaning of the title is supposed to be derived from Daniel vii. 18; and there the Septuagint gives simply *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου*; and in viii. 17, Daniel himself is so addressed. In John xii. 34 the Jews are represented as at a loss to understand the meaning of the phrase, 'Who, or what is this, the Son of [the] Man?'

have a multitude of diametrical contradictions on vital points, and are compelled accordingly to reject the whole narrative as unhistorical, unless we choose to say that the Synoptic account is to be received at the expense of the Johannine version.

We have, therefore, to see whether the Synoptic accounts be coherent and credible. Now, at starting, it is clear that Jesus could obtain this foreknowledge of his sufferings and of their details in one of two ways only. If we ascribe to him a human consciousness, he must have reached this knowledge either by a study of the Old Testament writings or by a direct spiritual channel. But Jesus is described as appealing expressly to types and prophecies in the Old Testament scriptures; and hence, if the spirit which taught him was a true and divine spirit, the sense which he is said to have put upon the passages referred to would be the original and right meaning. But we have no means for ascertaining that he really attached to them the meaning which the evangelists clearly supposed to be the true one. Certainly it is not the meaning of the passages themselves.¹

Not knowing how to deal with this very serious difficulty, some have sought refuge in the statement that the natural sagacity of Jesus would enable him with tolerable certainty to prognosticate the issue of his labours. He must have known, they think, what effect his works and teaching would be likely to produce on the minds of the Scribes and Pharisees; and he cannot, therefore, have failed to see that, at no distant day, tortures and death should

¹ As in all instances of passages from the Old Testament writings quoted in those of the New Testament, the words are either misread, or misunderstood, or both. The chief passages here adduced are Isaiah l. 6 and Psalms xxii. and cxviii.; but not one of these has any immediate reference to the sufferings or death of the Messiah. Isaiah l. 6 describes the ill-usage dealt out to prophets who have set their faces like a flint, because they know that God is on their side. Isaiah liii. gives the history of the spiritual Israel, the chosen servant and child of God. Psalm lxviii. is an expression of thankfulness for an unexpected deliverance which might be wrought in any age, while Psalm xxii. describes the persecution of the faithful under the guise, not of a crucifixion, but of a chase of wild beasts. The piercing of the hands and feet point, not to the nailing on the cross, but to their transfixion by darts and arrows, while the hunters seek his life with the sword, and the dogs fasten firmly on the prey.

be his recompense. Seeing this, he must further have known that, as the Jews had no longer the power of carrying capital sentences into execution, he must be handed over to the Gentile governor, while the brutality of Roman judicial procedure would warrant the expectation that his death would be preceded by torture. But on this hypothesis of natural calculation, how was Jesus to know that other influences might not come in to cut short his career before his enemies at Jerusalem could lay a hand upon him? How could he tell that Herod, who, it is said (Luke xiii. 31) had already been seeking to catch him, would not by some sudden manœuvre seize him and put him to death, as he had seized and slain John the Baptist? How was he to know that the Jews might not rise in tumult and put him to death as irregularly as they are said to have afterwards killed Stephen, leaving the Roman police to deal with the question after the fact as best they might? But, according to the story, there is not a hint or a trace of any such natural calculations. The sequel is but very slenderly connected (if it be connected at all) with its antecedents, and no room is left for the ordinary issues of the causes supposed to be at work. Indeed, there seems to be no free agency anywhere. Every detail is mapped out with minute exactness; and everything is to take place precisely as the picture has been drawn in some mysterious and 'seemingly unknown writings.¹

Thus, as the Old Testament passages do not relate to the death of Messiah, the anointed King, Jesus could only have been spiritually guided to a knowledge of his future sufferings. But the evangelists insist that he spoke only on the authority of ancient scriptures. If they were mistaken in so thinking, it follows that these details were derived not from the passages cited in support of their opinion, but from a source similar to that which furnished the colouring and incidents of the stories of the nativity. In other words, Jesus did not give these details or utter these predictions, and consequently the narrative is throughout unhistorical.

¹ *Secundum Scripturas.*

If, leaving this ground, we say that Jesus is represented as predicting his sufferings and death, because before his day sufferings and death had come, in the Jewish mind, to be associated with the idea of the Messiah, then we are driven to inquire whether this statement be true in fact. In other words, we have to determine the factors which went to make up the conception of the Messiah, as it may have presented itself to the minds of the people among whom the traditions recorded in the gospels were growing up. It may be possible to cite passages from the prophetic writings which furnish pictures of a healer or deliverer, ruler, judge, or king, on whose life would rest an unfailling and unbroken splendour. But this is scarcely the picture of those heroes and kings to whom (if they had any acquaintance with the historical books of the Old Testament writings) they must have looked up with the deepest reverence. The days of Hezekiah and Josiah closed in gloom or in disaster; and the question remains, whether we have anywhere else the picture of a comforter and consoler of mankind, starting amidst the grateful praises of the people on his beneficent career, yet oppressed at last by the treachery of enemies who hate him without a cause, and, though done to death by them, reappearing again in his former greatness. The Jews, certainly, if they looked backward on the annals of their past history, had not far to search for at least the main features of such a suffering hero or king. Why did the women weep in the temple for the smiting down of Tammuz or Adonis? Was not he the lord of life and light, bringing health and healing to the good and the bad, to the just and the unjust, but overwhelmed for a time by the powers of darkness? Why did they, too, as they mourned and wept, say, as they always did say, that he for whom they lamented would rise again on the third day, once more to display the glories of his countenance until the yearly revolution of the circling months brought round the time at which he must die again? It would be absurd to suppose that the temple at Jerusalem was the only place for the commemoration of this great catastrophe and of the uprising which followed it. We know that

it was not so. The Egyptian Osiris returns from the dead to take his seat as the eternal judge; and from Egypt we may wander away to find the same drama in the religious life and worship of other lands.

All that we can do here is to get rid of popular misconceptions, and so perhaps to clear the way before us. The instances already cited may surely be taken as warranting the statement that the quotations from the Old Testament writings in those of the New fail in every case to give their real meaning. It is, therefore, bare fact that the citations supposed to favour the evangelistic idea of a suffering Messiah do not refer to this idea. If Ezekiel¹ speaks of a purification from sin and idolatry, he does not in any way connect this result with the sufferings of a Messiah; and the prophecy of Daniel² simply states that this reformation will be effected in the time of some great deliverer. The apocryphal books say nothing about a Messiah; the tongue of Josephus is apparently sealed on the subject of any Messianic hopes entertained by his countrymen; and Philon drops no hint of Messianic sufferings.

We have thus two different conditions at two different times to deal with; the one being the celebration of the dying and uprising of the Lord of Life and Light, as maintained in the temple at Jerusalem in spite of the protests and denunciations of the prophets generally; the other being the fact that, when Jesus announced that this death, followed by uprising after the same time, must come upon himself according to the Scriptures, the idea was, as we are assured, utterly distasteful to the disciples. If we are to take the gospel stories as trustworthy records of historical facts, they had been charged to raise the dead not less distinctly than they had been charged to do other works of mercy. They may have witnessed the recall to life of the widow's son at Nain, or other instances of the exercise of the same power; but for all this, it is most emphatically said that, when Jesus told them of the issue of his ministry, they could not tell in the least what the

¹ xxxvi. 25, xxxvii. 23.

² ix. 24.

rising from the dead might mean (Mark ix. 10). No doubt it was one thing to lament the death of Adonis in the temple at Jerusalem, and another thing to be told by a loved and venerated teacher, that he too must die and rise again. But this does not touch the real point of the case, which is this, that even on the hypothesis that the idea of his sufferings and death had been utterly strange and wholly distasteful to them at first, yet if it had been constantly and solemnly and in full detail propounded by Jesus, as we are repeatedly told that it was after a particular stage in his ministry, as in the Synoptic Gospels, or with less detail from the beginning of it, as in the fourth Gospel; if it had been illustrated in carefully wrought discourses, which even his enemies were allowed to hear, it is simply impossible that his teaching could have remained unintelligible to them, that it should have left on them no impression whatever, and that it should have produced in them no practical effects. So far, then, as the gospel stories are concerned, these constant declarations were all thrown away, and the time spent upon them was wasted.

But this is not all. The disciples, without a single exception, act as if they had never heard any such predictions. Far from being prepared for his violent death, they are unable to realise even the fact that he was to fall into the hands of his enemies; for no sooner is he seized than they all forsake him and flee (Matt. xxvi. 56; Mark xiv. 50). Hence the repeated statements that they did not understand, and could attach no meaning to his words (Luke ix. 45, xvii. 24), look much like sentences introduced to account for facts which may have been perplexing even to the evangelists. The words put into the mouth of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus,¹ point in the same direction, and could not possibly have been uttered, if Jesus had repeatedly told them in plain words (as we are assured that he habitually did), that a violent death would be his recompense at the hands of the Jews.

¹ Luke xxiv. 20. 'The chief priests and rulers have crucified him. But we trusted that it should be he who should have redeemed Israel.'

The very inability of the disciples to understand is explicable only on the supposition that they had never heard the words which they are said so persistently to misapprehend.

Hence we have not a shred of evidence that Jesus predicted his death to his disciples; and the statement that he did must be set aside as unhistorical.

CHAPTER III

PREDICTIONS OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

WE have seen that, according to all the Gospels, Jesus had foretold to the disciples not only his sufferings and the manner of his death but also the fact of his resurrection; and according to the fourth Gospel, this announcement was made not only to his followers but to friends and enemies alike to whom he addressed himself at Jerusalem. This rising again was to take place on the third day after his death, and, like most events in his life, it was to be brought about according to the writings; and these writings or scriptures, whatever they may have been, were not less accessible to his disciples than to himself. That such plain and detailed announcements should be forgotten almost as soon as they were made, is in the last degree unlikely—so unlikely that we may fairly set it down as an impossibility; but if they had ever been uttered or heard at all, it is absolutely certain that their verification could not possibly have been treated with contempt, when the tidings of their accomplishment were first brought to those who had heard these predictions. Yet this is the astounding phenomenon exhibited in all the Gospel narratives. The disciples are simply incredulous until, by an irresistible weight of ocular evidence, they are convinced of a fact, the conception of which had never before dawned upon their minds. It is useless to cite all the passages which may be adduced in proof of this; and it is scarcely necessary to do so, as the general unbelief of the disciples is not denied by any one.

The great question is, whether this unbelief was really anything more than ignorance, and whether this ignorance was anything more than a result of the fact that they had never heard the words which they are said to have misunderstood. The effects of admitting this unbelief on the part of the disciples are momentous. When, immediately after the transfiguration, Jesus warns his disciples not to reveal what they have seen until he has risen from the dead, we are told that they questioned among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean (Mark ix. 10); and yet this wonder is expressed by men who, according to the same gospel, had already witnessed the raising (it was supposed to be such)¹ of the daughter of Jairos, and, according to the other gospels, had seen other instances also. Either, then, they had never spoken these words, or these wonders never took place. If they had read of, and believed, the marvel recorded of the dead body of Elisha, and the marvels of re-animation wrought by that prophet and his master Elijah, they must have been familiar with the idea from their childhood, and as they must in this case have associated that idea with ordinary men, so must they have been in an eminent degree prepared for the same, or for greater, results in the person of the Messiah.

In spite of all this, no sooner is the body of Jesus taken down from the cross and laid in the grave, than the women declare their purpose of embalming it—a task which shows that they at least had never heard of his coming resurrection, or that, if they had heard, they put no faith in it; and when on the third day they come to the grave, their fears are only that their strength should not suffice to roll away the stone from the entrance. If, again, Mary Magdalene had ever heard of the predictions, and given any credit to them, it is clear that when she saw that the body was not in its place, she must have concluded that the promised resurrection had occurred. But she neither remembers nor trusts, and all that she can think is that the body had been stolen (John xx. 2). Still more, when the women announce the fact to the disciples, the

¹ See p. 324.

latter treat their words with profound contempt.¹ It is absolutely impossible that they could have thought and spoken thus, if they had even once heard from the lips of Jesus that he should assuredly rise again within a precisely definite time—far more if they had heard him say this repeatedly, earnestly, solemnly, before friends and enemies for several months, or (as in the fourth Gospel) years.

Hence it follows, either that the predictions were made, and in that case the disciples did not speak and act as they are said to have done; or that they did so speak and act, and in this case these predictions were never uttered. In either case, the narratives, as occurring in the same set of documents, are convicted of being unhistorical.

To invest the difficulty with a still more extravagant colouring, while the disciples are represented as not even dreaming of such a result, the Scribes and Pharisees are said to have been perfectly aware that Jesus had predicted his resurrection. The words seem to be wholly forgotten by the disciples; but his enemies 'remember that that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again,' and ask Pilate, accordingly, that a watch may be kept over the grave by a body of Roman soldiers. But if they 'remembered' that he had so spoken, they must, it would seem, have heard him speak thus. Hence the apostles and the Scribes both heard this announcement. The former were incredulous; the latter believed, and yet thought that by some contrivance they might frustrate a purpose which, on the hypothesis that they credited it, must have seemed to them divine. If they did not credit it, all predictions were superfluous. Both suppositions are alike incredible; and therefore the narrative must be dismissed as a clumsy fabrication.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the efforts of some writers to get out of this difficulty by giving to his words a merely metaphorical interpretation, that although Jesus himself might die, yet his

¹ The word used is *λῆρος*, which Liddell and Scott, *s.v.*, translate by 'idle romance, humbug, trumpery.'

work would not perish with him but be carried on more effectually by his followers. If this had been supposed to be the meaning of Jesus, the Jews would never have asked for a guard of soldiers, but would have insisted on a forcible repression of his disciples, as they are afterwards said to have done when the apostles began their work of preaching in public.¹

Since, then, there is no evidence whatever that Jesus predicted his resurrection in plain terms and with definite notes of time, as he is said to have done, all those figurative discourses in which we are told that he signified it must be put aside as having no bearing on the traditional belief. The announcement made in the fourth Gospel (ii. 19) on the purification of the temple has been sufficiently examined already. The sign of Jonah is really a piece of borrowing from Assyrian mythology; and it is significant that in one version (Luke xi. 29-32) it is not the submersion of Jonah but merely his preaching to the Ninevites which is adduced as the sign to be given to the evil Jewish generation—a sign which, in strange contrast to most of the signs already spoken of,² the hearers of Jesus could really understand. Hence, also, we are compelled to conclude, further, that all the passages which are cited from various parts of the Old Testament writings as pointing to the local or sensible resurrection of Jesus³ are invested with a meaning which does not belong to them—this meaning being simply an interpretation put upon them after the alleged event.

¹ Acts iii. 17, 18.

² See pp. 176-177.

³ Luke xviii. 31, xxiv. 25; Acts ii. 25, xiii. 35.

CHAPTER IV

PREDICTIONS RESPECTING THE SECOND ADVENT

THE four Gospels, regarded as historical records, started with a strong presumption against them, arising from the fact that the book bearing the name of the Acts of the Apostles (on which the historical credit of the gospels in great part, if not wholly, depended) had been found to be altogether untrustworthy, as, throughout, contradicting the narrative of the only contemporary writer of any book in the canon of the New Testament writings.¹ Unless the apostle Paul was lying, when he solemnly asserted that he was uttering the bare exact truth, the accounts given in the Acts of the wonders at Pentecost, of the trial and death of Stephen, of the conversion of Cornelius, and of the Council of Jerusalem, must be regarded as history garbled to suit a particular purpose. In like manner, the predictions which the Gospels give of the second advent start under an exceedingly strong adverse presumption, because the predictions respecting the death and the sensible resurrection of Jesus, already examined, have been found to be destitute of any real historical character.

These predictions of the second advent form the subject of the great discourse which fills the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of the first Gospel, and is given in a shortened form in Mark xiii., and in a more fragmentary shape in the seventeenth and twenty-first chapters of Luke. According to Matthew, as Jesus leaves the temple for the last time, his disciples call his

¹ We have already seen in what sense the Apocalypse may be an exception.

attention to the magnificence of its structure, and receive for answer the announcement that the days are coming when this temple shall be razed to its foundations, and not one stone of its walls shall be left upon another. To their second demand for the time of these events and the signs of their fulfilment, Jesus replies by warning them against false Christs, and against thinking that the wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes, which should precede the great catastrophe, were the immediate tokens of the final consummation. These would be only the beginnings of sorrows (xxiv. 8). They were, however, to be sure that the destruction predicted was about to fall on the temple, when they should see the abomination of desolation stand in the holy place (xxiv. 15), or, as the third Gospel puts it (xxi. 20), when they see Jerusalem encompassed about with armies. Then it would be time for all who would escape the great ruin to flee from the city; and well would it be for those who were not with child or mothers of infants, or if this wretched time came not during the winter. In those days the false Christs would again appear (Matt. xxiv. 24); but they should produce no effect on those who remembered that the coming of the Son of the Man would be sudden and abrupt as the flash of lightning which gleams across the heaven (xxiv. 27). Following immediately on this fearful tribulation (xxiv. 29), the sun and moon should be darkened, the stars should fall, and the sign of the Son of Man should be seen in the heaven, and all mankind should be summoned to stand before his great tribunal. On seeing these things, they might be as sure that the end was come as they knew that summer may be looked for when the fig-tree puts out its leaves. As to the time, thus much further was determined, that the generation then living should not pass away until all had been fulfilled (xxiv. 34). Thus much was surer than the established order of the universe (xxiv. 35). All that was left uncertain was the exact day and hour (xxiv. 36), which was unknown even to the angels of heaven and to the Messiah himself. Hence, although all would be accomplished within the space of some thirty years, yet the

uncertainty as to the precise period would leave room for all the worldliness, sensuality and carelessness which marked the generations or days of Noah; and thus the advent of Messiah would come upon them as unexpectedly as if they had been told that it might take place at any time within a thousand years. Hence the paramount need of incessant watchfulness for all who would win their Lord's approval at his coming.

This discourse, as given in the first and second Gospels, is to all appearance quite coherent. If it be so, it asserts positively not only that the temple and city should be destroyed within a few years, but that the existing order of the world should be brought to an end, and the final judgement of all mankind be completed, within the lifetime of the then present generation. But although the destruction of Jerusalem was accomplished very closely in the manner described (so closely as to make the predictions read like a history of past events), yet after the lapse of more than eighteen centuries this world continues much as it was in the days of Herodotos or Thucydides. Hence it follows that in so thinking Jesus was mistaken, and we are therefore brought to this dilemma. Either he announced the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world as events which would come to pass within some thirty years, and in this case the words put into his mouth have been falsified; or he did not make this announcement, and in this case these discourses are a fabrication after the destruction of the city, but *before* the time when the idea of an immediate advent was seen to be a mistake.

In a strictly historical analysis like the present all thought of consequences must be rigidly put aside. What we have to deal with is the one question, whether Jesus did, as a matter of fact, deliver the discourse in the first Gospel (xxiv., xxv.), or whether he did not. The plea that the prosecution of such inquiries may involve danger to the faith of Christendom is quite irrelevant. These predictions have nothing to do with those 'primal and indefeasible truths' which alone constitute true Christianity, and of which, in the words of Dean Milman, 'men may attain to a

clearer, more full, comprehensive, and balanced sense, than has as yet been generally received in the Christian world.'¹ If any will have it that their Christianity is imperilled by the laying bare of historical contradictions, the fault must be with themselves.

To those who seek to reconcile the phenomena of the Gospels with the popular ideas respecting the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, the inconsistency of these discourses with the subsequent history of the world presents the gravest difficulty; and efforts have accordingly been made to prove either that Jesus spoke wholly of events still future, or of events all of which are past, or that in different parts of his discourse he referred to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the final judgement of mankind. Of the first two pleas we need take no notice, because neither opinion finds acceptance with any religious bodies or schools in this country. Of the third, it is enough to say that the theory stands or falls with the presence or absence of definite notes of time assigning the several parts of the discourse to the two different events of which it is said to treat.

These marks of time are not to be found; and the commentators move at random, parcelling out the various portions of the discourse to one or other event much at their own convenience. The first attempt to assign all to the destruction of Jerusalem, until we reach the 31st verse of the 25th chapter of Matthew, fails partly because it makes much of the preceding portion unintelligible, and in part because it is impossible to suppose that the transition from an event which took place eighteen centuries ago to another which is yet future would be denoted merely by a conjunction; for the two verses run thus: 'Cast out the useless servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But when the Son of (the) Man shall come in his glory and all his angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne.' The translators of the English Authorised Version must have been conscious of the difficulty, for they omitted the troublesome *but*.

This attempt having failed, the next effort is to throw back the

¹ *History of Latin Christianity*, Book iv. ch. x.

point of transition; and it has thus been maintained that the destruction of the city and temple is spoken of only to the end of the 28th verse of the 24th chapter, the remainder referring altogether to the yet future judgement at the end of the world. The answer is, that even in the first Gospel the final consummation is announced as coming 'immediately after'¹ the former tribulation;² and to avoid this difficulty it is stated that the word translated *immediately* implies not chronological sequence but the abrupt or unexpected occurrence of an event indefinitely distant. The words assigned to Jesus are thus taken to mean, 'When the tribulation of the days in which Jerusalem shall be destroyed shall have passed away, then after some indefinite interval, which may amount to myriads of years, all of a sudden the great consummation will fall like a thunderbolt upon mankind.' To this the reply is (1) that if this be the meaning of the words translated *immediately*,³ any words may be made to mean anything; (2) that the parallel passage in the second Gospel⁴ states distinctly that the signs of the final consummation shall be seen in the very days which follow the former tribulation; and (3) that Jesus himself is described as saying that everything should be accomplished within the limits of the existing generation.

Driven to bay, yet not altogether despairing, such writers have next sought to show that the word *generation*⁵ does not mean that which is popularly denoted by it, but a dispensation or constitution of things, which may be spread over countless ages. The answer is that Jesus, speaking to those who had asked him for the signs which should precede the destruction of the city and the second coming of Messiah, tells them, after speaking of the darkening of the sun and moon and the sending forth of the angels (Mark xiii. 29-31), 'Likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors' (Mark xiii. 33); and then follows the

² There is, no doubt, a latent but complete contradiction between this statement and the declaration that neither the angels nor the Son himself know the time for the great final trying.

³ εὐθὺς δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων.

³ εὐθὺς δὲ.

⁴ xiii. 24, ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην.

⁵ γενεά.

solemn assurance that that generation should not pass away till all be fulfilled. By referring to another passage (Mark xiii. 33) we find not only that the great consummation would come during that period, but that some of those who were then standing before Jesus shall 'not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

It follows that in these discourses Jesus is described as placing in the closest connexion the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the end of the world, and that this connexion has been falsified by subsequent history. The efforts made to resolve the signs of the last judgement into a series of figures and metaphors referring to the general education of mankind are not worth noticing. It may be enough to say that the words could not possibly have been understood in this sense by any who heard them, and that, if they had suspected this to be their meaning, they would have turned away with the painful conviction that they had been cheated and cajoled. This idea, that Jesus could thus in one and the same discourse pass without sign or notice from one subject to another, using throughout ambiguous and equivocal phrases which he knew would be misunderstood, would go far towards exhibiting him as an impostor; and we need only add that this ignominy would be put upon him solely and wholly by conservative apologists.

If we were to give our judgement on these grounds alone, we should be compelled to say that Jesus, in thus coupling the final judgement chronologically with the destruction of Jerusalem, expressed his own belief, and that this belief was mistaken. But the fact that we have not the slightest warrant for supposing that Jesus predicted either his sufferings, his death, or his resurrection, at once brings the historical character of these other discourses into the gravest suspicion; and this suspicion is heightened when we find that of these discourses not a trace is to be found in the fourth Gospel. Now it is a singular fact that in the second Gospel (xiii. 3) these discourses are delivered, not before the general body of the disciples, but privately to Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

Hence John was the only evangelist who heard them, and he (if he wrote the fourth Gospel) is the only evangelist who takes not the slightest notice of them. Is it, then, possible to believe that these discourses were ever uttered at all? The desperate urgencies of the case have induced some to say that John was purposely silent on the subject, because he wished to give no encouragement to a Gnostic or Doketic philosophy; but, as we have already seen, the fourth Gospel relates the most Doketic of all wonders, the walking on the sea, and the evangelist would have poured disgrace on his calling and office if he had suppressed what he must have felt to be vital truth, merely because he feared that the consequences might be not quite what he should wish them to be. Hence, if the writer of the fourth Gospel was one of the immediate followers of Jesus, and the only evangelist who is said to have put to him the question about the fall of the temple, it is certain that Jesus never spoke the discourse about that event and the second advent which the Synoptics put into his mouth; and, again, if the Synoptics were right in saying that he thus spoke, then the writer of the fourth Gospel was not one of the apostles.

For the origin of these discourses we are in no way bound to account. It is enough to have shown that they are utterly unhistorical. Yet it may be worth while to note the singular exactness with which every particular relating to the destruction of the city and temple was realised in the overthrow of the city by Titus. Thus one portion of the prophecy has been as signally verified, as the other has been contradicted, by later history. This exact correspondence between the prophecy and its fulfilment, coupled with the fact that the fourth Gospel says nothing of either, makes it a matter of certainty that the predictions respecting the fall of Jerusalem are pictures drawn after the events which they are said to foretell, and that the predictions respecting the final judgement belong to that period during which the conviction of the immediate return of the Messiah was present with overpowering force in the little society of Christians. Thus we see that these discourses were composed while the incidents of the destruction of Jerusalem

were fresh in the minds of the writers, and during that short period in which the anticipation of an immediate general judgement had not been shaken by the quiet lapse of time. Hence these discourses were drawn up before the writer of 2 Thessalonians ii. 2 found it needful to inform his disciples that they were not necessarily to expect the return of Jesus as the judge within their own lifetime, and before the writer of 2 Peter iii. 8 was constrained to affirm that with God one day might be a thousand years.

For those who are not hampered by the traditional notions respecting the authorship of the fourth Gospel it is easy to account for its silence on this vital topic. It was written not by an apostle, nor in the circle of those who looked for an immediate visible return, nor within the time before the rising of the scoffers who said that, in spite of all prophecies to the contrary, everything continued as it had been long ago. It was the expression of a later mode of thought, which for visible and palpable signs had substituted a spiritual process. In this Gospel also there is a judgement; but it is in no way connected with the fall of the Jewish polity; nor is this judgement heralded by portentous phenomena on the earth or in the heavens.¹

¹ See Appendix F.

CHAPTER V

THE ENEMIES OF JESUS

By some singular fatality the writer of the fourth Gospel seems incapable of describing any one incident in the life of Jesus as the Synoptics have described it. It might have been thought that, if about one fact more than another there could be no difference of opinion, it would be the nature of the opposition made to his ministry and the source from which that opposition came. Yet in these two narratives (the Synoptic and the Johannine) the causes of the offence, and the persons who take offence, differ altogether. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is pre-eminently the righteous teacher, who insists that a merely formal religion, or a mere lip-service, is abominable in the sight of God, and who accordingly opposes himself unshrinkingly to all who enforce the paramount necessity of outward rites and ceremonies. Hence he naturally rouses the fierce enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he, in his turn, stigmatises in the severest terms. It is felt on both sides that the struggle is one for life and death. On the one side are the traditionalists, who challenge submission as sitting on the seat and inheriting the authority of Moses, and who affirm that a violation of the outward precepts of the law places the offender beyond the reach of divine mercy; on the other is the tender sympathiser with all human weakness, who will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. With him there is no such iron rule of external ceremonies. With him it is no sin to sit down to meat with unwashed hands, or to pluck the ears of

corn as he walks through the fields on the Sabbath-day. For such offences they denounce him as a friend of publicans and sinners, as a gluttonous man and a winebibber; nor does Jesus hold any measured language as he upbraids them for cleaning the outside of platters while their inward parts are full of ravening and wickedness. Hence in the Synoptic Gospels the cause of offence is purely moral. It is the assertion of a spiritual freedom against the yoke of a carnal sacerdotalism.

Of all this there is not a trace in the fourth Gospel. In the other narratives his enemies are confined almost wholly to the ruling class; in the Johannine Gospel they are chiefly found in the great body of the people. Of any infraction of ceremonial ordinance we hear nothing. They are offended, not by breaches of the Sabbath, but by assertions of the Logos doctrine and of the pre-eminent dignity which, for that reason, attaches to the person of the Christ. They are roused to wrath, not because Jesus justifies himself for healing on the Sabbath-day, but because he defends himself in a way which asserts his equality with God (v. 18). They cannot, we are told, tolerate the expression that in a way which cannot be predicated of other men he and his Father are one, or that before Abraham lived, Jesus is. They are offended, not because he upbraids them for rejecting prophets and righteous men, but because he speaks of himself as the living bread which came down from heaven (vi. 41). Finally, while in the Synoptics the opposition is brought to a height by the parable of the husbandmen and the vineyard (Matt. xxi. 45), in the Johannine Gospel that which determines the counsels of Caiaphas and his adherents is the raising of Lazarus. Here they are not stung by any personal rebuke; all that they fear is the growing popularity of Jesus, which may (so it is said) draw down upon them the vengeance of their Roman masters.

It is hard to believe that we are reading narratives which profess to relate the life of the same person. In the Synoptic Gospels, the opposition, slight at first, gains strength as Jesus assumes a more uncompromising tone; and it is only after a long

series of controversies that they form the design of putting him to death. In the fourth Gospel, Jesus gives them from the first a ground of offence which could not easily be increased, and his opponents, accordingly, from the first seek to kill him, the expressions in v. 18 implying clearly that this wish was not then awakened in them for the first time, but only intensified by the higher claims put forth by Jesus.

In the Synoptics, although at Nazareth he causes a storm of indignation chiefly because as a prophet he rebukes the men of his own country or his own house, the common people hear him gladly; in the fourth Gospel they discover only irritation or hatred. It is the crowd of common people (vi. 24) who murmur (vi. 41) because he spoke of himself as having come down from heaven and as being endowed with power to raise up, in the last day, all who believed in him. It is among the mass of the people that the conversations are held on the sincerity or the imposture of Jesus (viii. 12). True, there are other passages in this Gospel which exhibit some of the people as well-disposed towards him (vii. 31-40); but the many among the people who believe on him are only a set-off to the many of the rulers who were secretly his adherents, and of whom, apparently, not one adhered to him according to the Synoptic evangelists. But if anything were needed to show the looseness of plan which the writer of the fourth Gospel proposed to himself, it would be found in the fact that the whole of the terrible denunciations contained in viii. 34-50 are said to be addressed 'to those Jews who believed on him' (viii. 31). Not a sign is there of transition from believers to unbelievers. There is room for none. When he tells these faithful Jews that, if they continue in his word, the truth would make them free, they reply by calling themselves the seed of Abraham and denying that they were ever in bondage. This misapprehension, which is of the very essence of the plan of the fourth Gospel, calls forth the questions which lead to the plain statement that they are children, not of Abraham, but of the devil, like whom they are liars and murderers (viii. 44).

If, then, in these particulars the Synoptic Gospels be correct, the Johannine version of the events is pure fiction; and if the latter be taken as the true account, no dependence whatever can be placed upon the former. The two exclude each the other; and the probabilities lie altogether in favour of the Synoptic statements, which represent Jesus as a practical teacher of righteousness, not as a theologian propounding deep and unintelligible verities. Hence, until we can show that the whole Logos theory was familiar to the Jews and Galilæans of the days of Jesus, the Johannine accounts of his enemies are not entitled to the slightest consideration; and thus it becomes almost a superfluous task to show that the writer of the fourth Gospel blunders in making the office of high priest at this time an annual one (xviii. 18). It had originally been held for life; it was now held at the will of their Roman masters, who, like the Turkish sultans of more modern times, set up and deposed pontiffs as it might suit their humour to do the one or the other.

CHAPTER VI

THE TREACHERY OF JUDAS

ACCORDING to the first Gospel (xxvi. 14) Judas Iscariot first formed, or first conceived distinctly, the design of betraying Jesus into the hands of his enemies immediately after the incident which took place in the house of Simon the leper. When the woman poured the ointment from the alabaster box on the head of Jesus, the *disciples*, we are told, were indignant at the waste. Jesus, in reply, merely bids them not to trouble the woman, because she was anointing him for his burial, and the poor they had always with them. 'Then,' the narrative goes on, 'one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,' and, having made a covenant for thirty pieces of silver, from that time sought opportunity to betray him.

The two incidents are placed in close sequence; but there is no apparent connexion. Nor is any supplied by either of the other Synoptics. In Mark the formation of the design follows the incident of the anointing at Bethany. In Luke (xxii. 3) we are merely informed that Satan entered into Judas as the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh. The fourth Gospel supplies a distinct motive. Here, as we have seen already, the unknown anointer becomes Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus; and the indignation at her wastefulness, which in the Synoptics is expressed by the disciples generally, is here confined to Judas, who specifies the sum of three hundred pence as the money wasted, and so withdrawn from the support of the poor. This speech,

we are told (xii. 6), was prompted not by any love for the poor, but because he was at once a thief and the purse-bearer of the society which had gathered round Jesus—the inference being that he had been in the habit of purloining from the bag with which he had been intrusted.

Yet more, while the Synoptics represent Judas as seeking through several days to betray Jesus, the fourth Gospel (xiii. 2) distinctly dates the formation of the design at the end of the last meal which Jesus ate with his disciples. At this moment he had had no conference with the chief priests and Pharisees; but he is set free to seek them out when Jesus bids him do quickly that which he purposed to do (xiii. 27). On his departure, which some of the disciples, we are told, attributed to the need of purchasing things necessary for the feast, or for a dole among the poor, Jesus delivers his farewell discourses which fill the four following chapters; but before they are finished Judas has arranged his scheme with the chief priests, and received from them a band of men and officers.

Can any credit, then, be given to the Johannine statement that Judas was intrusted with the funds of the society? Nothing is said about any such arrangement in any of the other Gospels; and hence it can be accepted only on the authority of the writer of the fourth Gospel. But we have already seen that the whole sequence of events, and all the motives of the actors in this Gospel, are altogether different from those which we find in the Synoptic narratives; and therefore no internal authority can be pleaded on behalf of this particular statement. But we are told in all the Synoptics that Judas agreed to betray Jesus for money, Matthew alone specifying the precise sum. Hence it would seem that his motive, in part at least, was covetousness. This idea might with the utmost ease grow into the story that Judas throughout exhibited an avaricious spirit, and as he could not do this except in reference to property, it would be natural to represent him as the common purse-bearer, and then to fasten upon him that objection of wastefulness which all the disciples

are said in the Synoptics to have urged against the woman who anointed Jesus. Thus we are led at once to the conclusion that the statement in the fourth Gospel is not historical.

But there remain still graver difficulties. In the Synoptics Jesus apparently has not, until a very short time before the occurrence, any anticipation that one of his apostles would prove unfaithful to him. In the first Gospel (xix. 28) Jesus, speaking after the commencement of his last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, assures all the twelve then present before him that they shall hereafter sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It is the fashion to get out of this difficulty by saying that all the promises of God are conditional; but all that we need urge in reply is, that in the text of Matthew this promise is not conditional. Hence, so far as the Synoptics are concerned, Jesus within a few days of the event did not know who should be his betrayer. But, according to the fourth Gospel (vi. 70), Jesus, more than a year before this time, had declared that one of the chosen twelve was a devil, and this prediction he is said to have made from his general and absolute foreknowledge *from the beginning* (vi. 64) as to who they were who believed not and who should betray him. This assertion, which ascribes to Jesus a consciousness not shared by any human being, involves also a terrible difficulty; for it implies, in fact, that Jesus, perfectly knowing what the result would be, knowing not only that one of the twelve was pointed out by ancient Scriptures as the son of perdition, but who should be this wretched person, singled him out with the eleven from the larger body of his followers, and then, knowing that he was a thief and that ultimately he would betray his master for a handful of silver, placed him in that precise post which would involve for him a constant and overwhelming temptation. The one thief, known to be a thief by a distinctly divine prescience, is selected to handle the funds of the little community in preference to eleven honest men whom he knew to be faithful to their trust. When we remember that he is said to have bidden his disciples to ask God, in the prayer which he taught them, that he would

not lead them into temptation, but that he should set them free from the evil within them and around them, we may most safely pronounce all this to be incredible and impossible.

Hence, then, we are driven to the conclusion that, if Jesus had the foreknowledge here ascribed to him, he would not have placed Judas in precisely that position which must be fatal to him; or that, if he did place him in this position, he did not anticipate the result, or, in other words, that he had not this foreknowledge. The Synoptic writers do not say that he had.

This subject has been discussed by a host of writers; but for my present purpose the topic is one of very slight importance. The apologies which some have urged for Judas that his treachery was absolutely necessary for the carrying out of the great scheme of salvation, and that but for this act Jesus would not have died, and man would not have been redeemed or forgiven, are purely theological in their nature; and they may be dismissed with the remark that they who can urge such pleas are far on the road to the thought that in betraying his master Judas acted wisely and well. It is, of course, quite possible that Judas, sharing the common notions of a Messiah who would come as a national deliverer and reign as a temporal king, may have intended to bring Jesus into a position which would make it necessary for him to throw off the garments of his humiliation and smite his enemies with the breath of his mouth. It is, in fact, the easiest of tasks to multiply imaginary motives, and thus to say that Judas expected a popular insurrection against the chief priests, whom he would on this hypothesis have deliberately cheated, and that he was disconcerted when he found that the latter had immediately delivered Jesus over to the Roman Governor. We may, if we please, think that Judas wished to get out of a dilemma which presented itself thus: 'Either Jesus is the Messiah, and in this case the bonds which his enemies may lay on him will fall off like the withs from the limbs of Samson; or he is not the Messiah, and in this case he will deserve his doom.' All these are possible but useless conjectures. None of the Gospels

tell us that Judas, more than the other disciples, took a political view of the Messiahship; and thus, if worldliness was not the sole motive of his acts, we do not know what the other inducements were.

When we turn to the narratives of the betrayal, we find ourselves in the same web of contradictions. According to the Synoptics Judas never leaves the company after Jesus had sat down to eat the last passover with his disciples until his treason has been consummated. He had no need to do so. His plan had been already concocted with the rulers, and his business was to keep as near Jesus as he could. According to the fourth Gospel he never formed the design of betrayal until the actual eve of the crucifixion; and hence it became necessary for him to go out (xiii. 30) in order to arrange his action with the chief priests. Hence commentators have with some eagerness fastened on this statement as showing that the traitor was not present at the institution of the Eucharist. To this it is enough to reply that the fourth Gospel makes no mention of this institution; that the Synoptics say nothing about the exit of Judas; that we are not at liberty to dovetail inconsistent and contradictory narratives; and that in the third Gospel (xxii. 21) Jesus is made to declare that the hand of his betrayer was with him on the table immediately after the institution of the Eucharist.

How the several details of a narrative which has been shown to be generally unhistorical grew up, it is in no way our business to explain. If it be possible or likely that the story of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was suggested by passages in the Old Testament writings (Matt. xxi. 9), it is not less likely that the details of the betrayal may have been derived from Psalms which spoke of the treachery of familiar friends who lifted up their hands against those who had eaten bread with them.¹

We come now to the circumstances attending the death of

¹ The reference is to Psalm xli. 9. Like others adduced for a like purpose, this passage has no Messianic signification; and if it be a psalm of the Davidic age, it refers to the treason of Ahitophel. But in its vague generality it is applicable to all traitors in all ages.

Judas. In the first Gospel (xxvii. 3) Judas, being seized with remorse on finding Jesus condemned to die, throws down the pieces of silver in the temple, and goes away and hangs himself. According to the narrative he makes no use of the money; and the other three Gospels say nothing about his death. In the Acts we are told that Judas himself purchased a field with the reward of his iniquity, and some time afterwards (how long we are not told) he fell headlong, and burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out (i. 18). According to this tale his death accounted for the field being named the field of blood. In Matthew the field is called the Potter's Field, and it is purchased, not by Judas, but by the priests and Scribes. We are surely not called on to notice the attempts at reconciling these contradictory narratives, made by apologists who tell us that they relate to different parts of the same transaction—namely, that Judas tried to hang himself, but that the rope broke, and that his sudden fall ruptured his fat or dropsical body. It is enough to remark that Matthew says nothing about the bursting, and the Acts nothing about the hanging, while the expression of Matthew¹ implies not the attempt only but the full accomplishment of his purpose.

Hence we are not warranted in saying more than that there may have been a piece of ground which, in early Christian tradition, became associated with the betrayer of Jesus. How it came to be so associated we cannot, in the absence of all historical evidence, determine; nor is it our business to do so. Yet if a verse from the 41st Psalm might suggest some of the details in the narrative of the betrayal, the maledictions on the treacherous enemy in Psalm lxix, might, with some slight necessary modifications, be with equal, if not with greater, ease embodied in the narrative of the Acts. The Psalm speaks of enemies in the plural number. The speaker in the Acts is thinking only of one. So he says that his (not their) habitation was to be desolate, and none were to dwell in his (not their) tents. Hence the accursed money is in the first Gospel devoted to buying a resting-place for the dead,

¹ ἀπ' ἑαυτοῦ, xxvii. 5.

and in the Acts it becomes a place of horror as the field of blood. All this is possible; but we cannot affirm it positively. Thus much, however, is clear, that the passage for which the first Gospel (xxvii. 9) refers us to Jeremiah is not to be found in the book which bears the name of that prophet, while in the margin of the English Authorised Version the reference is to Zechariah (xi. 12 13), and even this passage is not correctly quoted. Yet, even if it were, it would be quoted to no purpose, for the prophet is speaking of no act of treachery whatsoever. He has broken the staff called Beauty, as a token of the breaking of the covenant with all the people; and he then asks that he may be paid his price, which they to whom he speaks may withhold if they choose to do so. For his price they weighed him thirty pieces of silver; and this money, even this goodly price, he casts unto the potter in the house of the Lord. Here, it seems more than likely, we have the germs of the narratives both of Matthew and of the Acts. The potter suggests the name of the potter's field. The thirty pieces of silver are the thirty pieces received by Judas for his treason; and the payment in the house of the Lord is the purchase of the field by the priests before whom Judas had thrown down the reward of his iniquity. But in Zechariah, as we see, the person who casts the money to the potter is neither the traitor nor the priests, but the prophet himself and thus we have here another specimen of that mere play upon words which, as we have seen, marks most of the interpretations of prophecy given by the evangelists. Hence we do not even know whether the association of ideas, which connected Akeldama (if that really was the name of the field) with the name of Judas, had the slightest foundation in fact; and of the history of Judas himself we know absolutely nothing.

What we do see is that his action from any point of view is uncalled for and wholly superfluous. We will suppose that the chief priests and Scribes had made up their minds to cut short the career of the great Teacher, and we will do them the credit of supposing that they would employ the means which would most

easily serve their purpose. According to the fourth Gospel they had had experience of his character and mode of life for several years; and therefore they knew perfectly well that he was one who would offer no violent resistance to any officers of the law. In other words, they were well aware that he was not one whom it was needful to attack with a guard of soldiers under the guidance of a hired traitor. They had nothing to do but to watch him, as our police would now, from the moment of his leaving the temple to the moment at which it might be most convenient for them to apprehend him. In so tracing and watching him there could not be the least difficulty. They could follow him to the house where he celebrated the passover with the twelve, and wait until he left it to cross the brook Kedrôn; or, if they desired greater privacy, they could follow him further to the garden of Gethsemane. But the point to be insisted on is that they had no need of any guidance. They could, throughout the whole preceding day, have so watched him as to make escape impracticable, even if Jesus had wished to escape. As it is, there is in the Synoptic Gospels a certain appearance of tumult, with the glaring of lanterns and torches and the clashing of weapons; but all the disorder and din comes from those who are sent to arrest him, not from Jesus or his followers. Of the latter, one inflicts a wound, it is said, on a servant of the high priest; but he and the rest of the twelve forsake their master and fly. The betrayal of Judas thus becomes, according to the Synoptic Gospels, something like a ceremony to be gone through, and in the fourth Gospel the ceremony is dispensed with altogether. Judas stands among the guards and their companions; but he does nothing and says nothing, and Jesus takes no notice of him. With such conditions as these, is it possible to treat the betrayal by Judas as a fact of history?

There remain some points in reference to this strange story which call still for notice. Papias, of Hierapolis, tells us (in a passage preserved to us by Eecumenius and Theophylact) that Judas lived for some considerable time after the consummation of his treason, and that he walked about in this world a great example

of impiety, his body being so swollen that he died from injuries inflicted by a waggon which met him as he walked along. The cart was going on easily; but the road was not wide enough for the cart and Judas together. The result was that he was crushed by the waggon and his bowels were emptied out.¹ This is, of course, quite another story from that of our first Gospel. But Papias states emphatically that he had diligently inquired what Matthew said, and also what all the apostles said. His words, therefore, prove that he had not our first Gospel before him, and imply that it was not at that time known.² Theophylact further tells us (and seemingly he obtained his information from Papias) that the eyes of Judas were so closed in and sunk under the diseased fat of his face that they could not be perceived even by the aid of the optical instruments of physicians. He lived long enough, therefore, to be an object of interest to medical men, in spite of the running sores and maggots with which his body was covered. We are thus brought to a class of legends which deal with this method of vindicating divine justice. Herod (Acts xii. 23) is eaten of worms; and the myth spoke of the bowels of Arius as gushing forth at the critical moment when he ought to appear before Athanasius. A death not unlike these also overtakes Galerius, the persecuting colleague of Constantine.

The testimony of Peter must, it might be supposed, be more trustworthy than that of Papias; and Peter in the first chapter of the Acts is represented as giving quite another account of the death of Judas. The occasion on which he does so is one of peculiar solemnity. The apostles and disciples are tarrying in Jerusalem, according to the special command of the Master, waiting for the promise of the Father (i. 4); and it becomes their duty to fill up the number of the apostolic or missionary college by electing another to fill the place left vacant by the treachery and

¹ This, I suppose, is what Papias meant to tell us; but his way of telling it is so absurd as to remind us of the general estimate of his mental powers taken by Eusebius. See the remarks in *Supernatural Religion*, i. 483.

² They also imply that our book of the Acts was no more known to him than our first Gospel, his account of the death of Judas differing alike from both.

death of Judas. In the speech put into his mouth, Peter, speaking at latest not more than five or six weeks after the betrayal by Judas, and addressing himself in Aramaic to a body of dwellers at Jerusalem, tells them that Judas bought a field with the wages of his treason, and falling headlong came to a miserable end in that same field by the just judgement of God, and that this catastrophe was well known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that the field had, in their dialect, received the name of Akeldama, that is to say, the field of blood.

Now this speech comes to us in a book which, after a careful examination, we have found to be a history garbled from beginning to end, and freely eked out with fiction, where fiction seemed to the compiler necessary. But apart from these considerations, it is, to say the least, strange that Peter should speak of incidents of little more than yesterday as though they had happened long ago; that he should mention things as familiar to all who lived at Jerusalem when those to whom he spoke were living there also; and that he should tell them the name of the field in Aramaic, and give the interpretation of the name, when Aramaic was the native speech of his hearers. The difficulty is bewildering enough; and apologists assert that the sentences which give it this character are later insertions. It is enough to say here that the plea cannot be maintained.¹ We have seen that the speeches in the book of the Acts are, like the discourses in the Johannine Gospel, compositions of the author, or authors, of the book; and this speech of Peter was written at a much later time in Greek, 'for Greek readers who required to be told about Judas, and for whose benefit the Hebrew name of the field, inserted for local colouring, had to be translated.'²

So far then as our Canonical writings are concerned, the story of the judgement of Judas stands thus:—

Judas died in the field which he had bought.—Acts i. 18.

No. Judas did not buy the field; he refused to do anything with the money.—Matthew xxvii. 3.

¹ See farther, *Supernatural Religion*, vol. iii. p. 100, *et seq.*

² *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 106.

The priests bought the field after Judas was dead.—Matthew xxvii. 10.

No. Judas bought the field for his own use.—Acts i. 18.

No. The priests bought it to bury strangers in.—Matthew xxvii. 7.

The field is the potter's field.—Matthew xxvii. 7, 10.

No. It is the field of blood.—Acts i. 19.

Judas leaves the money in the temple, and the priests take it and with it buy the field.—Matthew xxvii. 3.

No. Judas takes the money and with it buys the field himself, and the priests have nothing whatever to do with it.—Acts i. 18.

For ourselves, we have no grounds for saying that the story of Judas contains a grain of historical fact; and a recent discovery proves the existence of a Christian tradition in the second century which asserts by implication that there was no betrayal of Jesus by any of the twelve disciples.¹

¹ If we may regard the fragment recently discovered as genuine, it follows that the Gospel of Peter not only takes no notice of the treason of Judas but even excludes it altogether. See Appendix D. In the Synoptic Gospels Judas plays a part not unlike that which Loki plays in bringing about the death of Baldur. It is noteworthy that we find not only that the Judas stories in the Synoptics are unhistorical, but that in one version of the Christian tradition there was no Loki and no Judas at all.

It is also noteworthy that some of the details in the betrayal story as given by Matthew are a result of a misunderstanding or misreading of the text of Zechariah. 'The consonants in the Hebrew text are perfectly correct; the vowels alone require to be amended. For *ha-jotsér* (the "potter") read *ha-jotsár*, which latter form represents the usual pronunciation of *ha-'otsár*, "the treasure-chest." Every thing is now clear. The treasure-chest is in the house of Jahveh; the treasure-chest is the natural depository for the remuneration which the prophet receives as the representative of Jahveh; if that remuneration be too insignificant to be carefully laid away within the chest, it must at least be thrown towards it.'—KUENEN, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, p. 478.

CHAPTER VII

THE PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER

IT must not be forgotten that the narrative of the incidents which precede the last meal of Jesus with his apostles is essentially one of wonder or miracle. The causation is that which we find in the *Arabian Nights'* tales. The directions given by Jesus to the disciples, that going into the city they should accost a man bearing a pitcher of water, who would lead them to an upper room prepared beforehand for the Master (Luke xxii. 10), are not less distinctly the outcome of a superhuman consciousness than the announcement before his triumphal entry that, at the crossing of two roads, they would find an ass and her foal tied awaiting their arrival (Matt. xxi. 2).

Thus, this narrative implies that Jesus foreknew the passing of the water-carrier at the precise moment when his disciples should reach that part of the road, and also that some particular person in the city had made ready a chamber for his use without receiving any orders to that effect. The attempts to reduce these incidents to the level of ordinary events are so absurd that they may be dismissed with the passing remark that the evangelists themselves assert his knowledge to be superhuman. Mark and Luke both think it necessary to state that the disciples 'found even as he had said to them' (Mark xi. 4; Luke xix. 32), a statement which they would never have made if the whole thing was preconceived; and both in this case and in that of the triumphant entry we have instances of the alleged magic power of the name of Jesus. The

owner of the beast instantly obeys the behest of the Master; the householder ushers his disciples into his room, as soon as they tell him from whom they come.

The historical difficulties in this narrative begin with the passage which relates the mission of the disciples. The first Gospel (xxvi. 18) leaves the number indefinite; the second (xiv. 13) states that two were sent; the third (xxii. 8) specifies these two as Peter and John. The directions given are not in all the same, Matthew saying nothing about the man bearing the water-pitcher. It is thus stated that John was, with Peter, charged with the special mission; and we naturally look to the fourth Gospel to find the account of the one evangelist who was an eye-witness, for if that Gospel was written by John the son of Zebedee, it seems strange indeed that we should not have from him a careful account of the several incidents which marked the last days of his Master's ministry. Yet on all these arrangements for the passover the fourth Gospel is wholly silent, while it excludes the idea that Jesus kept this passover with his disciples. In other words, the Synoptics represent Jesus as partaking with them of the Paschal lamb, while the fourth Gospel asserts that he was crucified on the morning of the day on which the Paschal lamb was to be slain. In the one case, Jesus died after observing the Mosaic ordinance; in the other, he is himself the Paschal lamb, and his death supersedes and abolishes the Jewish passover.

This astonishing difference has an evident theological basis; and it may very safely be asserted that this portion of the Johanneine Gospel could not possibly have been written until after the time when the Pauline Christians had definitely cast off all relations to the Mosaic law. It is the work of one for whom that law was dead, not of one by whom its precepts should be observed in conjunction with certain other precepts given to them by Jesus. Our present task, however, is not to trace out the theological *animus* of the writer, but to point out the contradictions which his narrative presents to the statements of the Synoptic evangelists.

The latter leave no doubt whatever as to the character of the

meal. The disciples are sent to the owner of the chamber in the city with the special message that Jesus willed to eat the passover at his house (Matt. xxvi. 18); and they make ready the passover accordingly (verse 19). Hence the meal mentioned in the verse immediately following cannot possibly be any other than the passover; but, as if to make assurance doubly sure, Jesus, in the third Gospel (xxii. 15), is represented as saying, 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer'; and the evangelist himself states that the meal took place 'on the day of unleavened bread, when it was necessary¹ that the passover should be killed.'

Not less clearly does the fourth Gospel speak of a meal which occurred on the day preceding the Paschal feast. The washing of the disciples' feet, and the discourses which fill the 14th and following chapters are all assigned to a meal which took place 'before the feast of the passover' (xiii. 1). Immediately after these discourses, and the prayer which follows them (xviii. 1), Jesus crosses the brook Kedrôn, and is in a few moments arrested by 'a band of men and officers.' When, in the course of this meal, Jesus bids Judas do quickly that which he had to do, some of the disciples understood him to mean that Judas was to buy the things that they had 'need of against the feast' (xiii. 29), a mistake which they could not have made if they were at the moment celebrating the passover. Yet more, the Jews on the morning of the crucifixion refuse to enter the judgement-hall of Pilate, on the ground that a defilement so contracted would disqualify them from keeping the feast (xviii. 28). A few hours later, they beg that the bodies of the crucified may be taken down and buried, as it was the 'preparation' for the passover (xix. 31), the Sabbath which began on that evening being 'a high day,' because the first day of the feast happened to fall upon it.

Sorely pressed by these fatal contradictions, some apologists have striven hard to show that the meal described in the fourth Gospel is an earlier one than the meal described in the Synoptics,

¹ ἑστῆα (Luke xxii. 7).

and, accordingly, they find a place for inserting the omitted portions at the end of the 14th chapter. When Jesus says, 'Arise, let us go hence,' the words indicate that at this point the disciples (one of whom, it must be repeated, is said to have been John himself) are sent to prepare the passover for Jesus; and here follow the incidents recorded in the Synoptics—the discourses in John xv., xvi., being delivered after the institution of the Eucharist, of which the fourth evangelist takes no notice whatever. But, indeed, it is manifest that all the evangelists intended to describe the last meal of which Jesus partook with his disciples. The washing of the disciples' feet is introduced as a proof that Jesus had loved them 'unto the end' (xiii. 1); and at this very meal (xiii. 38) he warns Peter that the cock shall not crow (in other words, that another morning shall not dawn), before he has thrice denied his Master.

Here, then, we have to take our choice between these two narratives, or to reject them both. It is impossible that both can be true. In whatever measure the balance of probabilities may incline in favour of the Synoptics, an examination of all the earlier portions of the fourth Gospel has long since shown us that in no instance can its statements be relied upon, and that in almost every instance they are in direct and flagrant contradiction with the plain assertions, as well as with the general spirit, of the other Gospels.

Hence any efforts to get out of the difficulty by maintaining that in this particular year the passover fell on a Friday, and that the Jews, not wishing to have two consecutive days solemnised as a Sabbath, postponed the eating of the lamb from the Thursday to the Friday, are mere labour lost. It is obviously useless to seek for modes of reconciliation, when one of the writers in question has been proved to have twisted his materials throughout to suit his special purpose. But if we do, what is the result? This only, that Mark (xiv. 12) would be wrong in asserting that Jesus sat down to his last meal with his disciples on the day 'when the Jews killed the passover,' and Luke wrong in asserting that this final meal took place on the day 'when the passover must be

killed' (xxii. 7). But, in fact, this is not a case for reconciling two narratives which in some subordinate points are inconsistent with each other. We are dealing with two stories, in one of which *every statement* identifies this last meal with the passover, while in the other every statement shows that it was held before the passover.

Others have objected that the meal cannot have been the passover, and that Jesus could not have suffered on the great day of unleavened bread, because it would be against the law so to treat a solemn feast day. The reply is ready. The Jews did not regard the sentencing and punishment of criminals as a desecration of feast days. According to the fourth Gospel (vii. 44), they sent out officers to seize Jesus on the great day of the feast of Tabernacles; and at the Dedication feast (x. 31) they tried to stone him. In truth, on these occasions, the places for administering justice were naturally more thronged, owing to the concourse of strangers in Jerusalem. But, again, even if we allow that these objections are valid, what is the result? This only, that as Matthew is said to have been present at this last meal, and as he is said to be the author of the first Gospel, then, if the tradition be wrong that it occurred on the passover day, he is himself wrong in placing it on that day. On such a point as this, the memory of an eye-witness can never deceive him, however weak it may have grown on subordinate details. Hence it would follow that the writer of this Gospel could not have been an eye-witness, and cannot have been the apostle Matthew, nor could his narrative carry any weight. But we have already seen that Jesus himself is represented as declaring that the last meal which he took with them was the Paschal supper (Luke xxii. 15); and this declaration must be paramount.

There remain other contradictions. Although all the Gospels represent Jesus as referring to his betrayer in the course of the last meal, the way of pointing him out in the fourth Gospel is far more minute than in the other Gospels, and the announcement is followed by the sudden departure of Judas, of which the Synoptics

know nothing. The latter, again, represent as the most prominent feature of the meal the institution of the Eucharist, in place of which the fourth Gospel introduces the washing of the disciples' feet. But neither do the Synoptics agree among themselves. In Matthew and Mark Jesus foretells the treachery of Judas before he institutes the Christian supper; in Luke he institutes the supper before he announces that one of them is to betray him (xxii. 21). The contradictions as to the disputes of the disciples for pre-eminence have been already noticed;¹ and we need only remark further here that the incident mentioned in Luke (xxii. 38) about the two swords is not found in the others.

These may, perhaps, be regarded as minor matters. It is, however, a subject of more serious moment when we ask how the fourth Gospel came to be silent about the institution of the Eucharist. It is useless to urge that this Gospel was designed simply to supplement the rest, for it gives with but slight variations the narrative of the marvellous or miraculous feeding of the multitude—useless also to maintain that it omits narratives which might seem to countenance Doketic errors, for it relates the story of Jesus walking on the sea—and, most of all, useless to argue that the evangelist related only what seemed to him of most importance. Was it possible that in the eyes of an eye-witness a discourse about humility (ch. xiii.) would appear of more importance than the institution of the Lord's Supper? Was it possible that the evangelist who had introduced into his Gospel discourses in which Jesus is said to speak of giving his flesh as meat and his blood as drink to all who believe in him (vi. 53), should say nothing about the solemn act in which he bade the apostles eat his body and drink his blood as he sat with them at the table? Can we avoid the conclusion that he is silent about this act, only because he was ignorant of it? Of course, it is not meant that he was ignorant of the Eucharistic feast as an ordinance of the Christian Church. The contrary is proved by the discourse in the sixth chapter; but there is no evidence to show that he

¹ See pp. 297, 345.

knew the precise mode in which it is said to have been instituted.¹ If he did know it, he has deliberately, for some reason or other, chosen to keep silence on the subject.

¹ There is another account of the institution of the Eucharist which is found in 1 Cor. xi. 23, *et seq.* This account, we are told, rests on the authority of the apostle Paul, and has his full sanction. I say nothing about this passage for the present. We shall have to examine it later on.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

AFTER the several indications, which we have come across at almost every step, of a fixed plan and a settled theological purpose in the fourth Gospel, it can scarcely appear unfair to remark that the Johannine evangelist has designedly omitted all reference to the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. But whether the omission be designed or not, the fact remains that we learn this incident only from the Synoptics. In the Johannine narrative Jesus no sooner enters the garden than he is surrounded by officers, to whom he surrenders himself without any greeting or salute on the part of Judas, who stands inactive among the crowd (xviii. 5).

But with the fact that there was an agony the agreement of the Synoptics ends. The first and second Gospels represent Jesus as taking with him Peter, James, and John, apart from the other disciples, and charging them to keep watch while he departs to pray by himself. The reason assigned for this charge is that Jesus was 'exceeding sorrowful, even unto death' (Matt. xxvi. 38); and the sequel is that Jesus twice offers up the same prayer, in the same words, that the cup of suffering may, if possible, be taken from him without his tasting it, and twice on his return finds the three apostles heavy with sleep. Departing from them the third time, he offers once more the same petition, and then coming back bids them rise up and go with him, because the traitor was now nigh at hand. The story of the third Gospel is very different. There (xxii. 42) we have only one prayer, while in the vision of

the angel strengthening Jesus, and in the sweat like great drops of blood,¹ we have two circumstances not found in either of the other Synoptics.

With the moral and theological considerations involved in this narrative we have no direct concern. It is enough to say that the Synoptic and the Johannine pictures severally are the outcome of radically different conceptions. It has been urged that the scene in the garden exhibits a depression and fear of bodily suffering not altogether consistent with the dignity and character of Jesus; but the contrast becomes indefinitely more pointed and bewildering when we turn to the picture which the fourth Gospel gives us of the last hours of Jesus with his disciples. This picture is one of such absolute tranquillity, it rises so completely into that serene region in which perfect love casts out all fear, that the outward signs of distress in the garden become in themselves well-nigh incredible. We are thus compelled again to say that for such incidents as the visible apparition of the strengthening angel we must have the evidence of documents contemporary with the events related and found to be trustworthy in the narration of ordinary matters, and an amount of evidence far stronger than that on which we receive incidents which fall within the range of ordinary human experience. But the Gospels are not proved to be the work of contemporary writers; they are not trustworthy in their accounts of the most ordinary occurrences; and the evidence which they offer for extraordinary events is even less than that which they offer for very ordinary statements.

In the present instance we are driven to ask how it is that Matthew and Mark make no mention of the strengthening angel. If the narrative be true, Matthew and John were in the garden, and John was one of the three whom Jesus kept nearest to him-

¹ Justin Martyr, although he knows nothing of the appearance of the strengthening angel, mentions the sweat as falling like drops, ὡσεὶ θρόμβοι. The tradition is clearly a different one from that in Luke, for Justin understood the drops to be not of blood but of water, and regards the incident as fulfilling the words of the Psalm xxii. 14: 'All my bones are poured out like water.' See, further, *Supernatural Religion*, i. 327.

self. If it be said that they are represented as heavy with sleep, and unable therefore to discern the heavenly visitant, the difficulty is only changed, not removed; for if these remained ignorant of the fact, from whom did the third evangelist receive his information? The Gospels furnish not the slightest warrant for the absurd idea that Jesus, in the course of that fearful night, informed his disciples of what had occurred, or that he spoke to them of it after his resurrection; still less do they explain why the two evangelists who were present did not care to record it in their Gospels, and why the stranger, Luke, alone thought it worth while to do so. So, again, we may ask how the bloody sweat on the person of Jesus could be known to the disciples who were on the spot, if they were asleep; and if they were not asleep (which yet they are said to have been), how they could have discerned it through the darkness of the night, for that it was a moonless and dark night is plain from the statement (if it be historical) that the officers who took him were lighted with lanterns and torches (John xviii. 3).

The fact is, that for this whole incident we have no evidence whatever. The whole body of the disciples entered the garden; but almost at the entrance they were told to stay and watch until he should return to them, while with the chosen three he advances some distance further—how far we are not told. At this point the three were in their turn bidden to stop and to watch while Jesus went and prayed ‘yonder.’ The distance to which he went beyond the spot where he had left the three is said to be about a stone’s throw (Luke xxii. 41), which may be taken to mean roughly some fifty or sixty yards. At such a distance the human voice could undoubtedly be heard, if sent with sufficient volume. But is it credible that any one in an agony of agitation and depression would so pray as to be heard at the distance of a hundred and fifty feet or more? Even had he done so, there would have been none to hear, for the main body of the disciples was admittedly not within hearing distance, and the three whom he kept nearer to him were as fast asleep as they were at the time of the

transfiguration—so fast asleep that they never heard their Master's voice until, addressing them for the third time, he bade them rise and follow him. The whole narrative is, therefore, strictly un-historical.¹

The narratives of the Synoptics are thus shown to be inconsistent and contradictory; but although in this story they cannot be trusted at all, we are not bound to account for the legendary character which they exhibit. It is quite possible that the three-fold trial or temptation which is said to have followed the baptism may have suggested the idea that the ministry of Jesus should likewise close with a threefold conflict: the three prayers in the latter case answering to the three rebukes of Satan in the former.

It remains to ask why the fourth evangelist should make no mention of this agony. It certainly could not be because he was asleep during its occurrence, nor because the story of the Synoptics was sufficiently consistent to render further corroboration superfluous (for this is not the case), nor because he took it for granted that his readers would learn the incident sufficiently from other sources (for if the traditions were already contradictory, he was the more bound from his personal knowledge to give the true version), nor because he dreaded to countenance Doketic or Ebionitic or Gnostic fancies (for he does not hesitate to insert the marvel at the marriage of Cana, or the wonderful feeding of the multitude, or the story of the walking on the sea).

The truth is that the plan of this Gospel would not allow him to mention it. The Synoptics represent Jesus as in great mental

¹ On the attempts made to identify the agony in the garden with the reply of Jesus (John xii. 23) to Philip and Andrew when they wish to introduce certain Hellenic Jews into his presence, it is surely needless to waste words. If the idea be correct, then the Synoptics were utterly deluded. If the scene took place as they record it, at night and after the last meal, how came the fourth evangelist to place it in the open day and long before that meal? Why, again, should Jesus be thus disturbed and depressed at the mere petition of some strangers who wish to see him? The incident may possibly have been suggested by some tradition of the agony on the night of the betrayal, although the plan of his Gospel required the Johannine evangelist to throw it back to a time preceding the great discourses which follow it. But it is impossible to trace every step in the working of so subtle a mind; and the historian is in no way called upon to make the attempt.

conflict and agony immediately before his apprehension; in the fourth Gospel there is, throughout, no conflict after the perplexing declarations which follow the request made by the Hellenic Jews to Philip (xii. 23-27). Long before the last meal Jesus has risen into a far higher atmosphere which cannot be troubled by vague fears of persecution, suffering, and death. In the long discourses which precede his final prayer in the seventeenth chapter, Jesus comforts his disciples and seeks to prevent them from being dismayed when the hour of trial comes; in the Synoptic narratives Jesus, at a time subsequent to that of the Johannine discourses, seeks the aid of his friends, and implores them to watch with him. In the former, Jesus speaks of the victory as already won (xvi. 33); and the intervention of a strengthening angel becomes both useless and distasteful to the writer. In short, here as elsewhere, the Jesus of the Synoptics has the least possible resemblance (we might almost say, has no resemblance) to the Jesus of the Johannine evangelist. With the thrice repeated brief prayer of the former it is absolutely impossible to reconcile what we can scarcely help speaking of as the great sacerdotal prayer in the latter (ch. xvii.). In this prayer Jesus says nothing of his own sufferings, while he dwells much on the sorrow of his disciples.

Thus, again, if we accept the Synoptic account as not wholly unworthy of credit, we are driven to the conclusion that the prayer in John xvii. is as unhistorical as the discourses which precede it. It is, therefore, unnecessary to draw out in greater detail other arguments in support of this proposition. Yet so glaring is the contradiction that we cannot pass by in silence the contrast which it furnishes in its general spirit to that of the Jesus whom we see in the Synoptic narratives. In John xvii. Jesus is, if we may so say, the ecclesiastical redeemer whose spiritual horizon is bounded by the circle of the faithful. As in the first epistle which bears the name of John (v. 19), so here, the outer world lies all in wickedness; and for this world the Johannine Jesus asserts distinctly that he has no prayer to

offer (xvii. 9). Others, it is true, yet remain to be called; but they are the sheep who are ready to hear his voice and to obey his call through the word of his disciples, not those who rebel against the divine law and resist the divine will.

There remains only the question of the authorship of this prayer. It professes to be a prayer in which the Divine Logos or Word addresses the unrevealed and unrevealable Father. It is a prayer which dwells throughout on the relations between himself and the Eternal God, from whom he has come and to whom he is about to return. It is absolutely inconceivable that such a prayer should be uttered aloud in the presence of a body of disciples, one of whom was about to betray him; and if it was not spoken aloud, how did the evangelist obtain his knowledge of it? To suppose that Jesus wrote down the prayer after he had offered it to the Father, is an impertinence, if not worse. To imagine that it was the direct subject of subsequent revelation, is to use words without meaning. If these modes of information are inconceivable and impossible, there is only one other alternative: The prayer is, from beginning to end, the composition of the evangelist himself.

CHAPTER IX

THE ARREST IN THE GARDEN

OF the events connected with the Passion we have seen that the whole history of Judas, of the betrayal, and of the agony in the garden, are absolutely untrustworthy and unhistorical. But if at the outset such conclusions are forced upon us, how can we expect to find firmer footing when we come to deal with the sequel? The foundation of the history has been taken away. We have nothing to do but to note and remember the fact, and then go on to examine the alleged records of later incidents.

According to the first Gospel (xxvi. 47), Judas enters the garden attended by 'a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people,' these being, of course, all Jews. Then by kissing Jesus, he points him out to those who might otherwise be unable to distinguish him. Jesus receives his traitorous salute with the question, 'Friend, wherefore art thou come?'—an inquiry which might seem superfluous if he had already known by a superhuman prescience (John vi. 64) that he had come to betray him. In the fourth Gospel Jesus declares, almost at the beginning of his ministry, that one of the twelve would betray him to his enemies; and, according to the Synoptics, for weeks, if not for months past, the fact of the betrayal is announced as preceding all the ignominy and insult which was to follow.

After this incident the emissaries of the Sanhedrim seize Jesus, and lead him away. The account of Mark (xiv. 43) is almost word for word the same; but, according to the third Gospel (xxii. 47),

the kiss is apparently not given, for when Judas approaches, Jesus asks him, not why he had come, but 'Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' thus implying a foreknowledge of the reason of his coming. In John (xviii. 2-5) Judas is, as we have seen, a mere bystander or spectator; he neither kisses Jesus, nor points him out, for as soon as his attendants enter the garden, Jesus himself advances and asks whom they seek. On their replying that they are sent to seize Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus answers, 'I am he'; and his voice at once has such an effect on them that they all go backward and fall to the ground; nor are they roused from their stupor or dismay till Jesus again tells them that he is the object of their search, and demands that his disciples should be allowed to go their way. Upon this they take courage, and, having bound Jesus, lead him away.

It is scarcely worth while to notice the attempts made to reconcile these contradictions with the notion that when Judas entered the garden, Jesus advanced and announced himself, as related in the fourth Gospel, and that Judas then went up to him and kissed him. It is not to be supposed that Judas had any abstract love of giving traitorous kisses—that it was an end with him, and not a means; but if Jesus had already made himself known, if at his word the whole crowd is thrown prostrate, and if they are roused only by the second announcement which Jesus makes, then, in going through the vain ceremony of a kiss, Judas acts the part of a mere simpleton. Jesus was already made known by his own acts and words: what need was there of anything further? The truth is that the two accounts cannot be reconciled; and the whole of our scrutiny has shown us that where the fourth Gospel contradicts the Synoptics, it is always unhistorical.

In fact, the fixed purpose of the Johannine narrative comes out in glaring prominence throughout this part of the story. The evangelist had described Jesus as saying long since that his death would be a voluntary offering; it would be the death of the good shepherd; and to prevent all chance of misapprehension, it is added (x. 18), 'No man taketh it (my life) from me, but I lay it down

of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' With these sayings the Synoptic narrative, which represents the captors as seizing Jesus at once, without any announcement on his part, could not be made to fit; and thus Jesus is, by the fourth evangelist, described not only as anticipating and rendering superfluous the betrayal of Judas, but as working a wonder by the mere sound of his voice; for that a marvel or miracle is here wrought it is impossible to disprove. If one or two men have made a momentary impression on two or three assassins, no instances are on record in which a man, by uttering a few words, so dismays a whole multitude to whom he is unknown as to make them all fall to the ground. Nay, further, the Johannine Gospel represents Judas as accompanied not merely by emissaries from the great Jewish Council, but by a military band and a chiliarch, who must clearly have formed part of the Roman garrison of the city; and these men, who knew nothing and cared nothing about Jesus or any Messiah, are sent staggering backwards not less than the Jews. But, in truth, the evangelist could not help himself. He had already represented the enemies of Jesus as on more than one occasion unable to seize him because his hour was not yet come; he had spoken of the officers of the chief priests returning baffled, with the plea that no man ever spake like Jesus (vii. 44); and he could not now describe the arrest as the ordinary capture of a suspected person, which in the Synoptic Gospels it undoubtedly is. All that can be said is that the germ of the Johannine idea is found in the assertion made by Matthew (xxvi. 53), 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' It may be further noted (although historically the statement has not the least importance) that the fourth Gospel gives an impotent conclusion to the matter by seeing in the demand of Jesus for the free departure of his disciples (xviii. 8) a fulfilment of the assertion made in his last prayer, 'Those that thou hast given me I kept, and none of them was lost but the son of perdition.' Whatever, then, be the value of the Synoptic

accounts, the Johannine narrative is thus seen to be a fabrication to suit a particular purpose.

As to the smiting of the high priest's servant by one of the disciples of Jesus immediately after the arrest, all the Gospels are agreed. But Luke (xxii. 50), and John (xviii. 10), alone specify that the ear cut off was the right ear, while the latter adds that it was Peter who struck the blow, and that the servant's name was Malchus. It is, at the least, strange, that the Synoptics should not have coupled the name of Peter with so marked an action; but there is nothing strange in the idea that a later writer might attach the name of a prominent and impetuous disciple to an anecdote which had hitherto floated about without one.¹ From the third Gospel alone we receive the information that the servant was marvellously healed by Jesus—clearly in one or other of two ways; for, as all represent the ear as 'cut off,' Jesus either fastened on the ear and made it adhere to the head, or he created a new ear in the place of that which had been cut off. For the mere stanching of blood by his touch, the servant would probably have felt no very deep gratitude, nor, in all likelihood, would the evangelist have cared to record the incident.

The statement in Luke (xxii. 52), that the chief priests and elders came in person to seize Jesus, completes the list of contradictions in this narrative. In all the other accounts only their emissaries enter the garden; but we have here, possibly, a mingling of two traditions—one which Luke followed himself when he represents Jesus as uttering to the chief priests the words which Matthew makes him speak to their officers, and the other, which

¹ It may be noted (as tending to prove that he had not our Gospels before him), that Justin Martyr not merely ignores, but excludes this incident. His emphatic assertion is that at the time of the arrest of Jesus not even one single man was found to go to his help, guiltless and blameless though he was.—*Dial.* 103; *Supernatural Religion*, i. 329.

Dr. Abbott accounts for this incident of Malchus, by a blunder of the compiler of the the third Synoptic, in reference to the word used by the Septuagint in translating the Hebrew of Jeremiah xlvii. 6. This word is ἀποκαταστήθι, which may mean 'put back in its place,' but might also mean 'cure,' or 'heal.' The first two Synoptics interpreted it to mean the sword, rightly. The compiler of the third Synoptic took it to refer to the ear, wrongly. Hence the miracle.—*Spectator*, Oct. 7, 1893, p. 464.

led the fourth evangelist to describe him as putting the question to Annas (xviii. 20).

Of the incident of the young man, mentioned by Mark, who fled away naked, leaving his garment behind him, it is scarcely necessary to take any notice. The incident is so pointless that many have conjectured that the young man must have been the evangelist himself—a proposition which can neither be denied nor affirmed; but why he should have thought it worth while to record the fact, it seems impossible to determine. It may be thought, perhaps, to add to the vividness of the narrative; and like the incident of the people crowding about the door (ii. 2), it is just one of those touches which a later writer might safely introduce without fear of contradiction, the insertion being in each case utterly insignificant. The point of vital importance is the fact, if it be a fact, that at this juncture 'all the disciples forsook him and fled.'

If they fled, then all the repeated forewarnings of Jesus throughout the fourth Gospel, all his assurances that the battle was to be fought out by himself, and that, after his seeming defeat, he would rise in a few hours from the grave, all the minutely detailed announcements of his sufferings and uprising made throughout the last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, were all thrown away upon them, and were as though they had never been spoken. Nay, more, as, even according to the Synoptics, he had laboured to convince them that, of necessity, he must be betrayed, must be seized, must be insulted, before the end could come, it is impossible that the disciples, if they attached the slightest credit to his words, could thus abjectly leave him on the mere threatening of a storm, and exhibit themselves not merely cowards but fools. If they are not to be stigmatised as either cowards or fools, or both, then not only is the whole Johannine narrative a fabrication, but the Synoptic writers must have enormously exaggerated, nay, rather, they must have invented, the details with which Jesus had announced his future sufferings. If they did not flee, then the statement that they did is an untruth. From this dilemma there is no escape; and one portion, or another, of this particular narrative is, therefore, unhistorical.

CHAPTER X

THE TRIALS BEFORE THE CHIEF PRIESTS

FROM the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was led away, it is said, into the presence of the chief priests and elders of the great council. But the Synoptists describe the scene as an examination before Caiaphas, while the fourth Gospel places the trial in the house of Annas. As in the previous instances, so here, this Gospel is in hopeless antagonism with the other three. The latter take him to the high priest: the former brings him before the high priest's father-in-law, who had no more authority in the matter than any other citizen of Jerusalem. But as it states that Annas sent him on to Caiaphas,¹ some might be tempted to fancy that there were two examinations—one before Annas, the other before Caiaphas—were it not that the Johannine evangelist ascribes to the trial before Annas those incidents which the Synoptists attribute to the trial before Caiaphas.

At once, then, if we regard the fourth Gospel as on an equality with the other three, we might be tempted to think that the latter were here in error; but it does not stand on a level with them. We have seen that in the matter of the high priesthood the evangelist was under the mistaken impression that the office was

¹ The translators of the Authorised English Version translated John xviii. 24, 'Now Annas had sent him bound,' etc. For this they had no excuse; and their act can be compared only with the device which avoided the categorical saying that Jesus was placed at one and the same time on the ass and its foal. There is no conjunction *now*; and the aorist cannot mark a definite time. The translators of the Revised Version turn it, 'Annas therefore sent him bound,' etc. There is, of course, no more authority for *therefore* than for *now*. The English ought to be simply, 'Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas.'

then a yearly one, and we see now that he makes the further mistake of supposing that there might be two high priests at the same time. According to Josephus, Caiaphas was high priest during the ten years ending with A.D. 36. Annas, his father-in-law (if he was such), had been high priest some time before; but three other high priests came between him and Caiaphas, none of whom bore the title after vacating the office. We may see, therefore, the value of the tale which represents one of the attendants of Annas as smiting Jesus for an alleged insult to the 'high priest' (John xviii. 22)¹; and what is of greater moment is that we may measure the trustworthiness of that strange story in the fourth Gospel (xi. 51), which tells us of the counsel given by Caiaphas to the members of the Sanhedrim. Men never act without motives; and commonly their motives are seen clearly enough. Here either Caiaphas and his associates have no motives; or their motives are incomprehensible. The Sanhedrim are here made to acknowledge their belief in the wonders wrought by Jesus (xi. 47); and two courses, therefore, were alone open to them. They were bound either to 'act upon their belief by acknowledging themselves as his disciples, or to say and to prove that his wonders were really due to diabolical agency. But no inquiry, no scrutiny is made; and from the notorious fact that many miracles (which are described as works of mercy) were being done, they jump to the conclusion that it is their business to put the doer of those works to death. For this conclusion they had absolutely no warrant; and the reason which is said to have led them to it is, on the face of it, absurd. They knew perfectly well that the Romans cared nothing whether one man was (whether innocent or guilty) crucified or not, and that, so far as they were concerned, any man might preach or teach as it might please him, so long as he did not come forward as a disturber of the Roman peace. The supposition that such a charge could be brought against Jesus, according to the state-

¹ The same mistake is made in Luke iii. 2, where Annas and Caiaphas are high priests together; and we find seemingly the same, if not a worse blunder, in Acts iv. 6, where Annas is high priest, his name being immediately followed by that of Caiaphas.

ments of all the four Gospels, is nothing less than ludicrous. No such danger could be feared from a teacher who, according to the Synoptic Gospels, had not entered Jerusalem since he emerged from private life, and whose only public demonstration consisted of the harmless welcome of those who escorted him as he entered into the holy city, if even this incident may be regarded as historical. In this story of the prophecy of Caiaphas it follows that no trust whatever can be placed; and the whole narrative of the trial of Jesus before him as the president of the council becomes in the very highest degree uncertain.

In all that relates to this trial the Johannine writer leaves us in something like Cimmerian darkness. That he transfers to the house of Annas events which, according to the Synoptics, took place in that of Caiaphas, seems to be quite clear. The result is a lame one, for on the examination in the fourth Gospel nothing is made to turn, and there is neither condemnation nor sentence. The denials of Peter in the Synoptic Gospels occur in the house of Caiaphas; in the fourth Gospel they are transferred to that of Annas. Why the Johannine evangelist should take him first to Annas, 'the father-in-law of Caiaphas,' and then afterwards (xviii. 14) mention Caiaphas as the giver of the counsel that Jesus must be put to death, we are left to conjecture. If he gave the counsel, and if he was the high priest, Jesus must have been tried before him and not before Annas; and thus the Johannine version is shown to be, as a historical record, worthless.

But it can by no means be said that the Synoptic evangelists are agreed amongst themselves. According to Matthew and Mark Jesus is led from the garden straight to the council chamber where the members of the Sanhedrim are assembled, although it is night. There follows then a formal trial, with accusation, witnesses, condemnation, and sentence. In Luke (xxii. 54-63) Jesus during the night is guarded in the high priest's house, and the council does not assemble before it is day (xxii. 66). This makes a difficulty with regard to the denials of Peter; for according to Matthew they take place while the trial of Jesus is going on

or after it is ended, while in Luke they occur during the night and before the trial. But, again, if Jesus was arrested in the early hours of the night and the trial was not held till the following morning, the cocks must have crowed many times in the interval, and hence Jesus would be mistaken in saying that before the cock should crow Peter should thrice deny him. Further, if, as Luke says (xxii. 52), the members of the council went in person to arrest Jesus, it is not easy to see why, having done the less dignified thing, they should not proceed to act in their usual capacity as judges, simply because it was not yet day. There is, in fact, no reason for delaying the trial; and, accordingly, in the other Synoptics it is not delayed.

It may be worth while (nay, indeed, it is needful), once again to note that even according to the Johannine version not more than about twenty years had passed away since Jesus in the temple astonished the doctors with his understanding and answers. How that incident (if it ever took place) bears upon his previous history and future career we have seen already.¹ Of those who then heard Jesus put and answer questions not a few must have been among the judges. If so, they must have known that they were dealing with the same Jesus of Nazareth. Is it, then, conceivably possible that they could have forgotten this circumstance, and forgotten, further, that he who at twelve years of age had astounded them by his wisdom, was one whose birth had been pointed out to all Jerusalem by the appearance of a star and the coming of the Magi; that over his birthplace the heavenly host had been seen and heard singing Hallelujahs in the sky; and that marvels preceded and accompanied the birth of his forerunner, the Baptist? For all that we hear, these things might have happened in Spain or Thule. They have floated away like clouds scattered by the sun, and have passed out of mind as though they had never been. Is this either credible or possible?

Of the charge connected with the destruction and rebuilding of the temple we have already made a careful examination,² the

¹ See Book III. ch. i.

² See Book III. ch. ix., Section 4.

conclusion being that the alleged historical incidents related in the fourth Gospel are fictitious. In the other Gospels we have only the charges founded on the words which, in the Johannine narrative, Jesus is declared to have actually uttered; and thus an absolute contradiction is given to the wonderful statement with which, in the Synoptic narrative, this charge is introduced. Here we have a grave assemblage of Jewish judges confronting a prisoner against whom the high priest had declared that there was a superabundance of evidence (for his wonderful works, if they were not proofs of his innocence, must certainly be tokens of his guilt), and the measure of whose misdeeds had been filled up by his raising of Lazarus; and yet not only is no reference made to these things, but the council, we are told, had but one object in view, and this was the finding false witness against Jesus. Were ever judges in any country known to prefer false testimony to true, if they could get the latter? We move, however, from one wonder to another. The evidence said to be given against Jesus in Matthew (xxvi. 61) turns out, if the story of the fourth Gospel be received, to be not false, but strictly true. Jesus had uttered the very words; and, as we have seen, it was not the fault of the hearers if they misunderstood him. They could not possibly have done otherwise. The silence of Jesus is proof that the testimony was not false. If he had not spoken the words, he must have denied that he had ever uttered them.¹ The whole story is manifestly a fiction; and the inference is that the trial before Caiaphas never took place in the way in which the Canonical Gospels describe it as having taken place. Each incident has been shown to be fictitious; and we thus have before us an alleged event, for each and all of the particulars of which we have no evidence. As to the trial itself we must leave it with the conclusion that, as the possibility of it cannot be denied, so neither can the reality of it be affirmed.

¹ There is a slight difference as to these words between the Johannine and the Synoptic versions. In the former Jesus is described as saying, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again.' According to the latter he says, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to raise it in three days.' With this we may compare John x. 18. See Appendix B.

Of the ill-treatment which Jesus is said to have undergone before the ecclesiastical tribunal we need say but little. According to the fourth Gospel (xviii. 22) the ill-usage came from a servant; but the servant was not, as he is here said to have been, a servant of the high priest, for Annas had ceased to be such for many years. In the second Gospel (xiv. 65) some out of the whole number of those who condemned him, *i.e.* the judges, spit upon and revile Jesus; and in Matthew there is nothing to distinguish those who thus disgrace themselves from the members of the council. In Luke (xxiii. 63) Jesus is ill-treated by his guards before the trial. We have thus a vague picture of some injurious treatment; but the story has no historical coherence.

The same or greater doubts hang over the denials by Peter. In the Synoptics Peter alone follows Jesus at some distance to the high priest's house. In the fourth Gospel the beloved disciple goes with him, and it is through his influence, we are told, as a personal acquaintance of the high priest, that Peter is admitted.¹ The various discrepancies in the rest of the story it would be tedious to trace out at length. It may suffice to say that in each Gospel the denial is said to be uttered thrice. Yet the circumstances so vary, that if the several accounts are to be regarded as trustworthy, Peter must have denied his Master some seven or eight times. The narrative of the fourth Gospel implies in portions that the first denial took place in the house of Annas, the last two in the house of Caiaphas; yet the 18th and 25th verses of the eighteenth chapter, taken together, imply that all these belong to the same place, for in the former of these two verses we are told that as it was cold the servants had kindled a fire of charcoal,

¹ This is one of many features in the Johannine narrative which are clearly intended to exalt the beloved disciple, who is supposed to be John the son of Zebedee, at the expense of Peter. Here John is the acquaintance, or, as some will have it, the kinsman of the high priest. In the other Gospels, which know nothing of a beloved disciple, he is a rough and ignorant Galilean fisherman, who, with his brother, receives the name of Son of Thunder. In Acts (iv. 13), the sons of Zebedee, with their fellow-disciples, are spoken of as 'unlettered and ignorant men.' It seems unlikely that a man so described should belong to the family, or possess the friendship, of the high priest.

before which Peter and others stood warming themselves ; then in verse 24 we have the statement that Annas sent Jesus back to Caiaphas, after which we are again informed that Peter stood and warmed himself, the conclusion being, necessarily, that it was at the fire before mentioned in the house of Annas. We are then told (1) by John (xviii. 17) that Peter, being questioned as soon as he entered, by a damsel who kept the door, then and there denied Jesus ; (2) by the Synoptists that the first denial is in answer to a maiden as Peter sits in the court of the palace (Matt. xxvi. 69 ; Mark xiv. 66 ; Luke xxii. 55) ; (3) in the fourth Gospel that the second denial was made while Peter remained in the same position. With this Luke (xxii. 58) agrees ; but (4) Matthew (xxv. 71) and Mark (xiv. 68) place it after Peter's departure into the porch, and say that it was made before one person, while in John it is uttered before several ; (5) Matthew and Mark assign the third denial to the same spot with the second, *i.e.* in the porch, and before many persons. In Luke and John it is still by the fire, and the latter describes it as an answer to a person who was related to Malchus, whom Peter had mutilated. The attempt to reduce all these denials to three, will, unless by an eclectic process we accept or reject details at our pleasure, have the effect of exhibiting not less than eight different denials. That the word *thrice* said to be used by Jesus in reference to these denials is to be taken literally, as denoting that number, cannot be doubted. In each Gospel the denials are numerically three ; and the question thrice repeated, ' Simon, lovest thou me ? ' in the supplement to the fourth Gospel is clearly designed as a parallel to the thrice repeated abnegation. Finally, even the incident of the cock-crowing is variously reported. In one version the cock crows once, in the other twice ; but the narrative of Luke has, in reality, no reference to the cock-crowing at all. The details of the story are worthless. Justin tells a different tale : that when Jesus was crucified all his friends stood aloof from him, having denied him, this denial having clearly been made before the crucifixion ; and this denial, as well as abandonment, is extended by him to all the disciples.

We have yet to notice some further difficulties connected with the relations of the nameless or beloved disciple with the high priest. It is not stated that there was any kindred between the two; but the whole story implies that their acquaintance was not a distant one, and it must not be forgotten that in the fourth Gospel this disciple (whoever he be) is the foremost among the followers of Jesus, as Peter is in the other three. He is, indeed, admitted to an intimacy which is not vouchsafed to any of the rest, and, therefore, no one would be better qualified to explain the real character and purport of his Master's teaching. Information on this subject (if in truth they needed any information) would, we might suppose, be the first thing sought by the Sanhedrim; and in fact we are told that this was the case (xviii. 19). The high priest asks Jesus of his disciples and about his teaching. Yet at the very time when this question was being put, both Peter and John (or the nameless or beloved disciple) were close at hand; and no effort is made to subject them to any examination whatever. Nay, Jesus himself in his reply refers them to those who had heard him in the synagogue and in the temple; and no notice is taken of his suggestion. All these, he declared, knew what he had spoken; but, although Jesus is smitten for alleged insolence to the high priest, no further questions are put (either to him, or to his followers, or to any who had heard him), while yet he stood before the Sanhedrim. Again, had not one of the council seen or heard him either in the temple or in the synagogue? But, indeed, if the story told of the beloved disciple be true, the high priest must have known well for months, if not for years past, that from his friend, or acquaintance, or kinsman, he could at any time obtain the most trustworthy information as to the life and teaching of Jesus.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

IT is impossible to separate the trial before Pilate from the incidents which are said to have led up to it; and our scrutiny thus far has forced us to the conclusion that the whole story of Judas is from beginning to end a fiction, and that, therefore, there is nothing historical in the narratives which tell us of the agony in the garden, of the arrest, and of the trial before the high priest and the council over which he presided. The alleged trial before Pilate is immeasurably more important, and we must follow it step by step in order to see whether and how far the records before us harmonise with what we know generally of the character of Roman judicial procedure. If we find evidence of this essential agreement, the conclusions which will in that case be rendered necessary must be admitted and acknowledged without hesitation or qualification. If this evidence be not forthcoming, all further inquiry as to incidents supposed to follow the trial will become strictly a work of supererogation. We can but take the statements of the Synoptic and Johannine narratives severally, and see how far they can be regarded as trustworthy historical records.

According to Matthew (xxvii. 2), who is followed by Mark (xv. 1), Jesus is not bound till he is sent on from the Sanhedrim to Pilate. In the fourth Gospel (xviii. 12) he is bound in the garden, and is sent on bound by Annas to Caiaphas; in Luke (xxii. 52) he is apparently not bound at all. Again, in the fourth

Gospel (xviii. 28) Jesus is led into the judgement-hall, or *prætorium*, while his accusers remain outside; and thus, at each stage of the trial, Pilate has to pass from the prisoner to the Jews, who will not enter his court for fear of defilement before the passover meal, which the Synoptics describe as having been eaten by Jesus with his disciples on the preceding evening. In their version, the judge, the accusers, and the prisoner, all stand in the same place, in the open air, where, according to Josephus, the judgement-seat, or *Bema*, was placed.

In Matthew (xxvii. 11) Pilate begins the trial by asking Jesus whether he is the king of the Jews; and the charge of his accusers is made after the question has been put. In John (xviii. 29) Pilate asks, in the first instance, the reason of his being brought before him; and the Jews, instead of answering his question by putting forth a formal charge, insolently inform him that if Jesus had not been a malefactor, he would not have been brought before him at all—an answer which no Roman governor would be likely to put up with, and which would assuredly have defeated the purpose of the accusers. Nothing is gained by insisting that the evangelists were possessed of little legal experience or learning, for if the tradition which they followed had been fairly in agreement with the forms of Roman judicial procedure, there would have been no ground for suspicion or downright distrust. As it is, we have here the first in the series of incidents or statements which prove that the story of the trial before Pilate, as given to us in our Canonical Gospels, is not to be depended upon in any of its particulars.

The reason why Pilate is here said to have put this particular question to Jesus comes out, it seems, only in Luke (xxiii. 2), who tells us that Jesus was charged with forbidding the payment of tribute to the Roman Cæsar. We may note that throughout the trial, Jesus, who answers some of the questions put to him, nowhere meets a manifestly false accusation with a plain and flat denial, and also that mere accusation seems to pass as charge and proof of charge together. If the question mentioned in Matthew

(xxvii. 11) was really asked, Pilate must necessarily have wished to have some proof of the fact that Jesus had styled himself king of the Jews; but the producing of proof or evidence is a matter on which no one seems to bestow a thought. As Jesus, however, is said to have answered the question in the affirmative, Pilate must have taken the reply in the only sense in which he could have attached any meaning to it, and therefore must have concluded that Jesus designed to set his own authority in opposition to that of the Roman emperor. But if this be so, it is impossible to understand how Pilate (Luke xxiii. 4) could tell the Jews (without receiving or even asking for any further explanation from Jesus) that he found no fault in him. This declaration from the representative of the Roman power should have barred any repetition of this charge. If Pilate listened at all to the assertions that Jesus stirred up the people by his teaching in Galilee and Judæa, he must have insisted on being made acquainted with the general character of that teaching; and, on discovering that there was nothing political about it, he must have dismissed the case, as Gallio is said to have done, as a matter with which he could not concern himself (Acts xviii. 15).

In Matthew (xxvii. 11-17) and Mark (xv. 3) Jesus, after answering the first questions, keeps silence when accused by the Jews; and Pilate asks him if he hears the multitude of the accusations brought against him. This incident is as impossible as the one which has gone before it. As a Roman judge, Pilate must have demanded, at starting, a definite charge, and have tried the case on that issue and not on any other. But Pilate, instead of dismissing the case as in these circumstances he was bound to do, is described as being perplexed by the refusal of Jesus to plead, and as trying to deliver him by suggesting that they should receive him (instead of Barabbas) as the prisoner who should be set free at that feast. Even this step on Pilate's part is, however, in the Synoptic narrative not easily accounted for. No reason is there given for his wishing to save Jesus from his enemies. The motive might, perhaps, be found in the fourth Gospel, where

(xviii. 36) Jesus is made to state plainly that his kingdom is not of this world, and that if it were his children would have fought for him.¹ But here arises a difficulty of another kind. According to the Johannine story, Jesus was within the prætorium, which his accusers refused to enter. Who then reported to the evangelist the conversation which passed privately between Jesus and Pilate, and, indeed, the incidents generally which are said to have occurred within the covered building? Surely not Pilate himself or his attendants; and there is something incongruous in the idea that Jesus could, after his resurrection, enter into details of history in the presence of his disciples. Indeed, the reports of the Christophanies in our four Gospels render the bare supposition absolutely impossible.

Not less impossible is the Johannine narrative of what took place within the prætorium immediately after Pilate's suggestion to set Jesus free in place of Barabbas. In the first place, Pilate, we are told, takes Jesus and scourges him, untried thus far and uncondemned; and then in his presence the soldiers plait a crown of thorns and put it on his head, while they array him in a purple garment, and then, with an abusive salutation, strike him with their hands. Without one word of rebuke to them for the insult thus offered to the majesty of law and to his own authority, Pilate instantly goes out again, and solemnly tells his accusers (if such they can be called), 'I bring him out to you that ye may know that I find no fault in him.' Having treated him as guilty, and having allowed his guards to treat him with cruel indignity, he now proclaims him blameless. The incident, as related, is impossible; in other words, it never took place.

The transfer of Jesus from Pilate to Herod Antipas, who is represented as being then in Jerusalem to keep the feast, is mentioned only in the third Gospel. The story briefly is, that Pilate

¹ The Johannine evangelist, probably feeling that spiritual obligations and convictions should have a more constraining power than merely temporal engagements, does not mention the desertion of Jesus by all the disciples, and by saying that the beloved apostle introduced Peter into the high priest's house, wishes, apparently, to keep that fact as much out of sight as possible.

sent Jesus, on learning that as a Galilæan he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction; that Herod, on seeing him, strove by questions to induce him to work some marvel or miracle;¹ and that on the refusal of Jesus to do as he wished, the tetrarch and his officers disguised him in a gorgeous dress, and sent him back so clothed² to Pilate, with whom Herod was now reconciled after some squabble.

This assuredly is not history. If Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, then Herod should have been left to deal with him altogether; and this he could not have done without taking him back to Galilee, and so interfering with the predetermined course of Messianic prediction.³ But, in truth, this was not the case for offences which had been committed in Judæa (Luke xxiii. 5). Hence Pilate had no right to transfer to another a duty which was entirely his own; and surely Herod must have had a somewhat better notion of the seemliness needed in judicial proceedings than to think that they were consistent with putting a prisoner, untried and uncondemned, into a ridiculous disguise, and dismissing him, after gross and ribald abuse. So, again, there is no reason why Jesus should refuse to answer a ruler to whose jurisdiction he is described as belonging; and, further, we may ask how it was that this incident should be unknown to the other Synoptics, and more especially to the author of the fourth Gospel, if, as apologists will have it, he was the beloved disciple. The story, as related, is clearly a fiction; and the incident never took place, as it is said to have taken place.

If the third evangelist stands alone in recording this episode, the first (xxvii. 19) has likewise another peculiar to himself in the message sent to Pilate by his wife, while he is still on the judgement-seat. She, it seems, had dreamed an agonising dream,

¹ This statement carries us back to the alleged relations of Herod with John the Baptist. See page 224.

² On this point the wording of the narrative seems to leave no room for doubt. The incident is irreconcilable with the Johannine story of the purple garment.

³ 'Thus it must be' is, as we have seen, the key-note of all that is said about the sufferings of Jesus in his passion.

and accordingly warns her husband (whom she would seem not to have seen before the so-called trial began) to have nothing to do with that just man. What, then, was the nature of this dream? What was its purpose, or had it none? Was it designed to bring about the liberation of Jesus? If so, then, on the popular or traditional hypothesis that the outward bodily death of Jesus was needed for the saving or healing of mankind, this dream should have a diabolical origin; and as it must not be allowed to deter Pilate from the course which was to end in his traitorous surrender of Jesus to his enemies, it could only deepen his guilt. We may compare this dream with the visions belonging to the nativity stories in this Gospel. As a supposed historical incident, it is fictitious; and one more impossibility is added to the others which we have had to notice in the examination of the narratives of this trial.

In like manner, Matthew alone of the evangelists goes on to relate a piece of conduct which, in a Roman governor, is inexplicable, incredible, and impossible. Pilate was in Judæa to exercise an authority before which the whole world bowed down. He was there to screen and defend the guiltless and to punish the guilty. The idea that he was there to surrender the innocent, knowing him and asserting him to be such, to those who were thirsting for his blood and eager to slay him with cruel insults, was one which the Emperor and the Senate would have scouted as treason, as a wild and monstrous extravagance.¹ Yet of Pilate, the guardian of the Roman peace, the first evangelist tells us that, finding all his efforts to rescue Jesus useless, he called for water, and, going through a symbolical ceremony which was not Roman, and which, for a Roman, would have neither force nor meaning, solemnly pronounces wholly innocent a person whom, according to the fourth Gospel, he had already scourged, knowing him to be guiltless, and whom he immediately proceeds to scourge again, and then to deliver to his enemies to suffer crucifixion—a penalty which could

¹ For the acts of Pilate and his report as spoken of by Justin, see *Supernatural Religion*, i. 325, *et seq.*

be inflicted only by Roman officers ; in other words, on his own warrant. Whatever may have been Pilate's shortcomings, and however much he may have feared the transmission of hostile reports concerning him to Rome, it is altogether impossible to believe that any Roman governor or officer would pour such complete contempt on Roman judicial processes as to commit murder at the dictation of a few riotous men. To hand over a man to others to be tortured and slain, when, at the same time, he solemnly proclaims his innocence, is to commit murder of the worst type. That the judge should himself torture the victim before yielding him up, is, if possible, to aggravate guilt already incredible. Verres was indubitably a much worse man than Pilate, and Cicero brings against him some astounding charges of cruelty and injustice ; but then Verres, like Appius Claudius in the legend of Virginia, or like Henry VIII. of England, contented himself with wresting the forms of justice¹ to his own purposes, and professed to regard as guilty persons whom he knew to be guiltless. Pilate does the reverse, and without formal charge, trial, condemnation, or sentence, delivers over to an ignominious death a man whom, in the same breath, he asserts to be wholly innocent as well as righteous. The whole incident as related is impossible. It never took place, as it is said to have taken place ; and this is the last feature in the so-called trial before Pilate. Every one of these features, as given to us, has been shown to be imaginary ; and hence it follows that we have no positive warrant for maintaining that the trial itself is an historical reality. Taking the stories as the evangelists relate them, we are driven to the conclusion that there was no betrayal, no arrest, no examination before Annas or Caiaphas, no judgement, and no condemnation, if we look merely to the historical evidence, for of such evidence there is none. The incidents in the trial before Pilate can only be taken one by one. They have been so taken, and each incident is shown to be ficti-

¹ This is the charge brought against Warren Hastings in the matter of Nundkomar. Hastings was, perhaps, never technically in the wrong, and he never professed to punish men whom at the same time he declared to be guiltless.

tious. The trial cannot therefore be legitimately treated as an antecedent to any events which are said to have happened subsequently.¹ The examination of these later events is, therefore, in strictness of speech, superfluous.

There are a few points connected more immediately with the trial itself which remain still to be noticed. Thus in Matthew (xxvii. 26) the scourging is inflicted; in Luke (xxiii. 22) Pilate is represented as saying that he will scourge him and then let him go; and thus the scourging is seemingly not inflicted, because the mob, stirred up by the priests and scribes, insists on the crucifixion. In the fourth Gospel Pilate scourges not as a preliminary to crucifixion, but in the hope that by exhibiting him, after scourging, in the purple robe, and with the thorny crown on his head, he may excite the pity of his accusers and the bystanders; and in this also Pilate is said to fail. We might well ask how he could expect to succeed. The accusers had charged him with claiming falsely a regal title. What could the wrapping him in the robe denoting consular or imperial dignity do but show them that Pilate at bottom favoured their accusation, and would have no scruple, if duly pressed, in complying with their demands?

We have thus before us already two instances in which Jesus is disguised in a dress which was not his own: the first being the gorgeous apparel² in which he is said to have been arrayed by Herod and his officers, and the second the purple robe which, according to the fourth Gospel (xix. 2), the soldiers put upon him *before* the ending of the trial. To these must be added, therefore, as a third instance, the disguising with the scarlet cloak, which Matthew (xxvii. 28) and Mark (xv. 17) place *after* the sentence,

¹ This is a point on which I must not be misunderstood. The record of each incident taken separately has been shown to be untrustworthy and unhistorical. But it is possible that events may take place, the reports of which may be in every particular incorrect. It may be thus in the case of the trial before Pilate. I fully admit the possibility of a trial without any of these incidents and without such termination; but I am bound not less clearly to say that we have no warrant of historical evidence for affirming the reality.

² Ἐσθῆρα λαμπράν, Luke xxiii. 11. The epithet carries us back to the picture of the transfiguration. See Appendix B.

or, rather, the surrender of Jesus to his enemies. In these two last-mentioned passages the evangelists specify not merely the brilliant robe but the crown of thorns and the reed sceptre. But as we can scarcely suppose that all these incidents were thus exactly repeated, the conclusion is, that the Gospel accounts are here, as elsewhere, contradictory, and that no reliance can be placed on any of them, the Johannine version being always the least trustworthy. Hence it is not worth while to examine the final statement of the fourth Gospel, that Pilate, when he found himself unable to deliver Jesus, relieved himself by asking the Jews, derisively, whether he should crucify their king, and on hearing from the Jews an expression of loyal devotion to the emperor, which must have been at least as unexpected as welcome, gave Jesus over to their will.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRUCIFIXION

WE enter now on an inquiry which, as we have seen, is, in strictness of speech, superfluous. If there was no formal trial and no formal sentence, there could be no carrying out of a judgement never given—in other words, no crucifixion carried out by Roman officers on the warrant of the governor. If in such case there was any execution, it could be nothing more than the result of mob violence acting in defiance of law, as the story of the Acts represents the Jews as acting in the matter of Stephen. There is, perhaps, little rashness in saying that we shall not find the inquiry more free from difficulty as we go on.

The innumerable instances in which the fourth Gospel is at variance with the Synoptic narratives may surely justify us now in saying that the Johannine story was put together by one who lived in a very different condition of thought and society from the compilers of the Synoptic accounts. They have, in fact, next to nothing in common; and we feel, therefore, no surprise, when we find that in the fourth Gospel (xix. 17) Jesus bears his cross himself to the place of execution, whereas the Synoptics (Matt. xxvii. 32; Mark xv. 21; Luke xxiii. 26) tell us that it was carried by one Simon, a Jew from Kyrênê, who was compelled to perform that office.

In recording the circumstance that a crowd of people, and especially of women, followed Jesus, bewailing and lamenting him, the third Gospel (xxiii. 27) stands alone. There is nothing im-

possible in such an occurrence ; but as it is not corroborated by any other writer, this is all that can be said for it. On the other hand, it looks much like an incident suggested by the passage in his last Synoptic discourse, in which Jesus foretold the misery of those who, as mothers or about to become such, might be compelled to flee from Jerusalem. The rest of the address of Jesus to the women (xxiii. 30) is merely a translation of Hosea (x. 8).

The precise mode in which crucifixion was carried out is a matter of controversy. Probably the practice was not invariable ; and hence we cannot determine in any given case whether the feet as well as the hands were nailed to the cross. We cannot determine it in the instance of Jesus. In the fourth Gospel (xx. 20), when he appears to the disciples, he shows them his hands and his side, clearly to point out the marks of the wounds—nothing being said of the feet. But no statement of the fourth Gospel can of itself carry the least weight ; and in Luke (xxiv. 39) the risen Jesus invites the disciples to handle his hands and his feet, thus indicating assuredly that both hands and feet had been wounded. But it is impossible to accept the Synoptic account as historical, merely because we are referred to a Psalm (xxii. 17), in which a piercing of hands and feet is spoken of, but where nothing is said about nailing, and where, certainly, there is not the most remote reference to the subject of crucifixion. Knowing the peculiar method of interpreting the Old Testament writings adopted by the evangelists, we may very reasonably suspect that this piece of detail was suggested by the wording of this Psalm, which has likewise supplied, in all probability, very many other incidents in these closing scenes.

According to Matthew (xxvii. 33) the soldiers who led Jesus had no sooner reached Golgotha than they offered to him a beverage of vinegar and gall, which he tasted but refused to drink. In Mark (xv. 23) the drink offered at the same time is wine mingled with myrrh, a totally different compound. Here, again, we are referred back to the Psalm (lxix. 21), where it is said, 'They gave me gall to eat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar

to drink'; and at once we see that the phrase may have suggested the whole scene, and must have suggested some of its features, for the Psalm speaks of eating gall, and this part of it was certainly not fulfilled. The second Gospel seems clearly to be an epitome; but we cannot even venture to say that Mark, having the narrative of Matthew before him, and being conscious of its improbability, substituted another drink to give the narrative a more plausible colouring.

This, however, is not the only sentence in which a drink is said to have been offered to Jesus. In Matthew (xxvii. 48), when he utters the cry, 'Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani,' some of the bystanders, prompted by a kindly feeling, put a sponge filled with vinegar to his lips, while others seek to prevent them. In Mark (xv. 36) the persons who at this juncture offer the vinegar, do so not from sympathy, but in derision. In Luke (xxiii. 36) the only occasion on which any drink is presented to Jesus is after the crucifixion, when the soldiers, mocking him, offer him vinegar (seemingly, the *posca*, or vinegar and water, commonly given to Roman soldiers). In John (xix. 29) vinegar is offered; but the circumstances are wholly different. It is presented, not on his despairing cry, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' but when, apparently with the express purpose of fulfilling a prophecy, he exclaims, 'I thirst.'

These contradictions are irreconcilable; but these inconsistencies in reference to the vinegar or wine bring us to other and more important contradictions relating to the sayings of Jesus upon the cross. If the evangelists had no clear ideas respecting the time when it was offered; if one places it after one exclamation and another after a very different one; and if the evangelist who mentions the one exclamation takes no notice of the other, what reasonable grounds have we for inferring that Jesus ever spoke the words at all? From whom did they receive the report of these incidents? According to the Synoptics, his acquaintance and the women who followed him from Galilee, all stood afar off; and all his disciples, they tell us, had forsaken him and fled. Here, as indeed everywhere, the fourth evangelist puts before us quite another

story. The others had abandoned their Master: he alone stood close to the cross, by the side of his mother Mary, and all that passed between them is unknown to the Synoptic writers. These, again, contradict each other. According to Matthew (xxvii. 50) and Mark (xv. 37) Jesus yielded up his breath merely after uttering a loud cry. In Luke (xxiii. 46) he dies after uttering with a loud voice the exclamation, 'Father, into thy hands I will commend my spirit.' In the fourth Gospel (xix. 30) his last words were, 'It is finished.' Here, again, the contradictions are irreconcilable; nor is it of any avail to gather up all the exclamations in all the Gospels, and make them up into seven or any other number, because (whatever may be said of previous utterances) it is impossible that more than one set of words can be the last words uttered by a dying person.

That two other prisoners were crucified with Jesus is asserted in all the Gospels; but here their agreement ends. In Matthew (xxvii. 38) and Mark (xv. 27) they are thieves or plunderers; and the latter evangelist adds that thus the prophecy respecting the numbering with the transgressors was literally fulfilled. In the third Gospel (xxiii. 32) they are styled evil-doers, a term of no distinctive meaning; in the fourth we have no description of them at all. In Luke, however, one of them seems to be scarcely a transgressor, for he not only refuses to revile Jesus, but points out to his fellow-sufferer that Jesus is wholly guiltless, and then, turning to Jesus, he beseeches him to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, and receives the assurance that he should that day be with him in paradise. Here, then, at a time when all the disciples of Jesus are described as smitten with overpowering dismay, a criminal, styled a thief, in the agonies of death, is enabled to apprehend the idea of a suffering Messiah and a purely spiritual kingdom. The circumstance is altogether impossible. Not one of the disciples had thus far risen to this high spiritual level; not one of them, if we are to place any trust in the narrative of the Acts, reached it for a time long subsequent to the resurrection. Hence the assertion has been hazarded that this was no common

criminal, but had probably been numbered among the seventy disciples. Why, then, it may be asked, did he leave that band? We know that it was no very difficult thing for a Jew to incur a capital sentence under a Roman administration. Yet there must have been some reason for this man's condemnation (if it ever took place); and some have not hesitated to connect it with schemes arising out of the expectation of a political or temporal Messiah. This only makes matters worse, for if such were his convictions, the idea of a suffering Messiah is the last to which he would rise, and the least likely to present itself to him in the tortures of a violent death. It must, however, be noted that of the behaviour of these malefactors the fourth evangelist says nothing: in the first two Synoptics they both simply revile Jesus; in the third alone does one of them recognise his true character. The silence of John may, perhaps, be imputed to ignorance. The account of Luke may be, not unfairly, ascribed to the natural growth of tradition which sought to find throughout the whole scene parallels to the favourable testimony borne to Jesus, both by Pilate and by the Roman centurion, who, as soon as Jesus died, exclaimed, according to one account (Luke xxiii. 47), 'Truly, this was a righteous man'; and, according to another (Matt. xxviii. 54; Mark xv. 39), that he was a Son of God.

On the cross of Jesus Pilate, we are told, placed an inscription. As to the fact all the evangelists are agreed; but as to the wording of it they differ more or less widely. Whatever the inscription may have been, the third and fourth Gospels agree in saying that it was set up in three versions—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, a statement which would be suspicious even in a really historical record. In the first Gospel, the form is said to be 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' The second gives it simply as 'The King of the Jews.' The third affirms it to have been 'This is the King of the Jews.' The fourth Gospel amplifies it into 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,' and adds that the chief priests, objecting to the inscription as being a formal recogni-

tion of his pretensions, applied in vain to Pilate to have it altered.¹

As to the division of the garments worn by Jesus, it looks much as though the details of the incident were all suggested by interpretations of supposed Messianic prophecies. That the clothes of prisoners were a perquisite of the executioners is not to be disputed; but in Matthew (xxvii. 35), Mark (xv. 24), and Luke (xxiii. 34), the soldiers are described as casting lots for all his garments; and Mark is careful to add that they did so in order to know what every man should take, no room being thus left for any exceptions. In the fourth Gospel we have, of course, quite a different story. Far from casting lots for all the clothes, they do so only for one; and whereas the Synoptic narratives imply that the number of soldiers was considerable, the Johannine version speaks of them as merely a quaternion, who divide the rest of his raiment into four portions, and then, not knowing how to deal with one garment, agree to cast lots for it. With the incident the evangelist connects the reason, that it was a seamless robe, woven from the top throughout.² The whole account is so removed from the region of history, that we may most reasonably trace it to a literal interpretation of the passage,³ 'They parted my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.' Want of acquaintance with the system of parallelism in Hebrew poetry led the Johannine evangelist to distinguish between the garments and the vesture, although the two clauses denote one and the same thing; and his narrative of alleged facts is the result of his mistake.⁴

The accounts given of the conduct of the spectators are not without significance. All seem bent on insulting and reviling

¹ The point is one of little importance. Apologists have said that there is no sufficient reason for supposing that all the evangelists proposed to give the same or the entire inscription. But when they speak of a form of words as affixed to the cross, it seems impossible to suppose that they did not intend to give the exact form, and we are driven to the conclusion that this was their deliberate purpose.

² See Appendix B.

³ Psalm xxii. 18.

⁴ With this we may compare the ass and the foal of the ass in the story of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The evangelist took 'the ass and the foal' to be two animals. The passage cited speaks only of one. See p. 358.

Jesus; but, in the case of the ordinary bystanders, it takes the form of a reference to the so-called false witness borne against him at the alleged examination before Caiaphas. They dwell on his destruction of the temple and its re-erection in three days. The theme of the mockery of the chief priests (who are made to be present at the execution) turns on the saying that he who saved others could not save himself¹ (Matt. xxvii. 39-41; Mark xv. 29). To these details Luke (xxiii. 35) adds that he was also insulted by the elders, that is, by the members of the great council; but on this whole topic the fourth Gospel is silent. The picture, whatever it be, exhibits no great verisimilitude. They cannot possibly have said many things which are put into their mouth. The words which they are made to utter are taken straight from the twenty-second Psalm, in which they are said to be uttered by the ungodly. The very gestures are borrowed, down to the shaking of the head and the shooting out of the lips. In plain English, the whole thing is incredible and impossible. The Scribes and Pharisees certainly did not professedly range themselves among the enemies of God, and it was impossible that they should make use of language which would infallibly give the impression that they did so account themselves, and took pride in doing so. Hence the words which the Psalmist ascribes to the blasphemers are just the very last words which they, being perfectly acquainted with the Psalm, would have thought of using. If for a moment we try to imagine the chief priests and Sanhedrim as deliberately adopting the ribaldry of profane scoffers, the absurdity of the scene is at once forced upon us; and we see clearly that the Pharisees are made to speak, not as they would and must have spoken in real life, but as the Christian legend of a later day required that they should speak.

According to Matthew (xxvi. 56) and Mark (xiv. 50), it would appear that none of the apostles witnessed the crucifixion. Some Galilæan women only are mentioned, and among these they name Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the

¹ For these two forms of mockery see Appendix B.

mother of the sons of Zebedee, who may be the same as Salome. In Luke (xxiii. 49) we are told that he was followed by all who knew him; and in this number the apostles would certainly be included. The contradiction is fatal; and here, as elsewhere, we find the fourth Gospel at variance with all the others. In this version the beloved or nameless disciple is present with the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross, the other women present being Mary Magdalene and the wife of Cleopas. Thus not only the persons vary, but the positions in which they stand are different. In the Synoptics, they remain afar off: in the fourth Gospel, Jesus looks down on the beloved disciple standing near him and commends his mother to his care. Of this striking incident the Synoptic writers clearly know nothing. If they had heard of it, could they have spoken of all the disciples as having fled? and is it possible that they could have passed by in silence the farewell charge¹ of Jesus respecting his mother, whose heart was pierced through with the sword of her son's agony? So, again, as we read the plain statement that from this hour the beloved disciple took her to his own home,² we may ask, not merely why the Synoptic Gospels should not record the fact, but why the writer of the Acts of the Apostles should record quite a different fact. In that book (i. 12-14) she is spoken of, not as dwelling in the house of John, but as sojourning with the society of the eleven apostles and the other disciples. Indeed, if the Johannine evangelist had been acquainted with the narrative of the Acts, he might have avoided what looks like the mistake of speaking of the private abode of the beloved or nameless disciple at a time when it would seem that, by the communistic rule of the Christian society (Acts ii. 45), he could have no private house to which he might take her. To say that he took her to *his own* house by taking her to the place where the whole company of the

¹ There is something strange in the fact of such a charge being given, if the anastasis, or resurrection, was to follow in a few hours.

² If this disciple was, as it is contended, John the son of Zebedee, his home would assuredly be in Galilee, not in Jerusalem.

apostles (i. 13) dwelt together, is obviously nonsense. Thus, then, if the Johannine narrative be true, the statement in the Acts is false; and if the latter be true, the story in the fourth Gospel is a fabrication.

The exclamation of despair uttered by Jesus on the cross introduces us to theological and psychical difficulties, which cannot be dealt with in a strictly historical inquiry. Regarding the subject from this point of view, we need only note that this incident is absent not only from the fourth but also from the third Gospel; that it cannot possibly have been the last, and, at the same time, not the last¹ exclamation uttered by Jesus on the cross; and that the true nature of the narrative is revealed, when we find that the expression is only a quotation from that Psalm (xxii.) which, as we have already seen, supplied a great part of the imagery of the crucifixion.

The discovery that no two narratives of incidents accompanying the crucifixion agree together, that not a few exclude each other, and that not one of them is self-consistent, leaves no room for surprise when we further find that the notes of time are likewise contradictory. According to Matthew and Mark Jesus gave up the ghost about the ninth hour (3 P.M.), the darkness having been on the land since noon, while Mark states definitely that Jesus was crucified about the third hour (9 A.M.). In the fourth Gospel, which always has a version of its own, Pilate at midday is sitting in judgement at the so-called trial of Jesus, who, according to Mark, had now been three hours upon the cross. If, further, Mark be right in his statement of time, it is not easy to see how the rest of his narrative, or that of Luke, can stand; for in Luke, as we have seen (xxii. 66), the Sanhedrim is not assembled until the morning of the day following the evening on which Jesus is said to have been arrested; and how between, let us say, the hours of 5 and 9 A.M., there would be time for the examination before the Sanhedrim, for the transfer of Jesus from the great council to the prætorium of Pilate, and thence to the house where Herod was

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 419-425.

staying, as well as for the return from Herod to the Roman judgement-hall, and, lastly, for the journey thence to Golgotha, it is hard (we may very fairly say, impossible), to conceive.

We have, then, in the narratives of the crucifixion a series of incidents, not one of which is related with that degree of consistency which would entitle it to a moment's consideration in a British court of justice; and we have to remember that it is preceded by antecedents which have been shown to be absolutely impossible.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS

MANY marvels and prodigies are said to have accompanied and followed the crucifixion and death of Jesus; but here, as elsewhere, the fourth Gospel is utterly opposed to the Synoptic narratives. The Johannine writer apparently knows nothing of all these wonders; at least, he has not cared to notice them. In Mark (xv. 33), with whom Luke agrees, we are told that from the sixth to the ninth hour there was a thick darkness over all the land, and (xv. 38) that when Jesus gave up the ghost the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; but no visible or sensible cause is assigned for this phenomenon. In Matthew (xxvii. 51) we have the same story of the rending of the veil at the moment of his death; but here the cause is an earthquake, which also split the rocks¹ and opened the cave sepulchres. Out of these opened graves, 'many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.'

All that we have to do is to range in their order the propositions which are involved in this astounding passage. In the first place, the darkness was not the result of an ordinary eclipse which (as was known to Thucydides² four hundred years before)

¹ The rending of the veil is one of the occurrences as to which it is difficult to see whence the evangelists could be supposed to receive their information. Would the chief priests, who alone had access to the sanctuary, be likely to reveal it? See further, *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 425.

² ii. 28.

can take place only at the new moon. Yet the gospel of Nicodemus absurdly attributes to the Jews the opinion that this darkness, occurring at the Paschal full moon, was an ordinary event. The assertion is ridiculous. An incident so marked as the enveloping of a whole land (the text says, of all the inhabited world) in darkness, must have made a profound impression and have been also duly recorded. Hence much toil has been bestowed on attempts to verify this extraordinary event; but nothing better has been obtained than an extract in Eusebius from Phlegon, which at most fixes only the Olympiad, *i.e.* brings the event within a limit of four years. The attempt to corroborate the narrative by reference to eclipses which are said to have taken place at the death of Cæsar or Romulus is mere folly. As for Romulus, we might as well bring forward an eclipse at the death of Herakles, or on the chaining up of Prometheus; and at the death of Cæsar not only did the sun, according to Virgil,¹ grow pale, but the Alps were shaken to their base—events which we know did not take place. The truth of one statement cannot be proved by bringing forward another which is false. The comparison is forced on us that as all Nature is described as agitated when Cæsar falls or Balder is slain, so also in the Gospels it mourns when the Messiah dies.

The time during which Jesus hung upon the cross involves a multitude of difficulties and contradictions. According to the fourth Evangelist (xix. 31-37) the Jews requested Pilate to insure the avoidance of pollution to the Sabbath by applying what was called the *crurifragium*, and so removing the bodies at once. The soldiers are accordingly ordered to break the legs of the prisoners. This is done in the case of the two fellow-sufferers with Jesus; but not in that of Jesus, because they find him already dead. To assure himself, however, of this fact, one of the soldiers pierces his side with his spear, the result being an outflow of blood and water, and also the fulfilment of the two prophecies which said that a bone of him shall not be broken, and that they shall look on him

¹ *Geo. i.* 475-478.

whom they pierced. It is impossible that the Synoptic writers should have passed these incidents in silence, if they had occurred. None of the three gives any hint of them; and Mark concludes the tale (xv. 43) by saying that the evening had already come when Joseph of Arimathea begged the body of Jesus. Even at that late hour Pilate marvels that death had occurred so soon; but this fact goes to prove that the order for the *crurifragium* had not been given. But, otherwise, the tale is absolutely incredible. Here are Roman soldiers, the most disciplined, perhaps, that the world has ever seen, charged to carry out a certain order, and they fail to do so because, in one case, they judge it to be unnecessary. One of them, however, has some misgivings, but to make matters sure substitutes a device of his own, in place of strict obedience to orders; and his action is so overruled because there are two prophecies which would otherwise remain unfulfilled.¹

The first Synoptic evangelist has, it is true, supplied in the earthquake a force quite adequate to the rending of a veil; but even conservative apologists have admitted that an earthquake, which split the rocks and rent asunder a flexible substance like a curtain, would have thrown down no small part of the solid building; but we have no evidence that any such event occurred. At once, then, the whole account is seen to belong to the region of what the Greek called *mythos*, to which our Anglicised 'myth' has imparted a slightly different connotation; but, further, it may most reasonably be urged that, if such an incident had taken place, it must have been constantly referred to by the apostles as amongst the strongest proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus. In point of fact, if the least credit is to be given to the narrative of the Acts, it was clean forgotten; and although the epistle to the Hebrews (x. 19-20) draws a pointed inference from the temple veil in reference to the priesthood of Jesus, it says not one word about its having been rent at the time of the crucifixion.

The story of the resurrection of the saints from the graves thrown open by the earthquake is found only in the first Gospel;

¹ See, for these prophecies, *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 433.

and as we have already seen that the narratives of the raising of Lazarus, of the daughter of Jairos, and of the widow's son at Nain are all unhistorical, so must this incident also be dismissed at once as wholly without foundation in fact. After reaching this conclusion by the road of historical criticism, we must ask further the purpose of such a prodigy. It could not have reference to the spiritual growth of the raised persons, for they are all raised at the same moment. If, again, they woke to consciousness as soon as Jesus died—*i.e.* if they rose on the Friday evening, but did not go into Jerusalem till the beginning of the following week, after what must be called the phenomenal or sensible resurrection of Jesus, where were they in the interval? and, again, to what life were they raised? When Lazarus and the centurion's daughter were raised, they need food and they receive it. They return, in short, to the ordinary conditions of human life. In this case, these risen saints must have needed hospitality. If they did not need it, they were phantoms like those whom Virgil mentions as having been seen in the dusk when Cæsar died; or, in other words, this was not a resurrection of dead persons at all, in the received sense of the term. Finally, we have to ask, what became of this large body of men who had returned to life from the dead?¹ An answer is scarcely needed. The tale is a mere legend, which has grown up from that association of ideas which linked the image of the Messiah with the notion of a resurrection of the just.

It may, perhaps, be thought that the third evangelist, by making Jesus expire after commending his spirit into his Father's hands,

¹ Dean Alford, declaring that their graves or sepulchres were opened at the moment of the earthquake, adds that inasmuch as Jesus is the firstfruits from the dead, the bodies of the saints in these sepulchres did not rise till he rose (that is, for some thirty-six hours after the earthquake), and that, having appeared to many after his resurrection, 'possibly during the forty days,' they 'went up with him into his glory.' This is very wonderful. The opening of the sepulchres would only expose the bodies within them to the attacks of beasts and birds of prey. Of the appearances of these saints, during the forty days, nothing is said; nor is any hint given in the Acts, that when Jesus went up into the heaven, a large company ascended up visibly with him. Archbishop Thomson seems to have

supplies an adequate reason for the exclamation of the centurion, 'Certainly this man was just' (xxiii. 47), while Mark represents him as saying that Jesus was a Son of God, merely because he cried out with a loud voice immediately before his death (xv. 39). Hence it might be urged that the narrative of Luke may be regarded as the more trustworthy, were it not that we are dealing now with a long series of incidents, of which every one is seen to be unhistorical, while not a few are palpable fictions; and almost the next step brings us to a fresh marvel in the statement that all the spectators returned to Jerusalem weeping and beating their breasts—a fact of which we have elsewhere not the faintest trace, and which embodies seemingly the Christian sentiment of a later generation.

Neither is it necessary to dwell long on the spear-wound in the side of Jesus. It is recorded only in the fourth Gospel, and may, therefore, be set aside at once as deserving of no credit. But the passage which relates it is ambiguous; and the word used² may denote either a mere needle-prick, or scratch, or a mortal wound. We cannot, therefore, say that the weapon used was the javelin or the spear. From the later passage, however, where Jesus is described as bidding Thomas thrust his hand into his side, it would seem to have made a large opening. Nor does the word translated *side* determine whether the wound was inflicted in a vital part; and all that medical science attests is the fact that if the lance pierced the body within a few minutes after death, while the blood is still fluid, blood would have flowed without water. If, at a later time, nothing would have flowed;

thought that the matter was explained by supposing that 'they returned to the dust again after this great token of Christ's quickening power had been given to many.' The statement has not even the testimony of one of the Gospels in support of it. See further, Colenso, *Natal Sermons*, second series, 124. The assertion of Dr. Alford that these saints could not rise before Jesus, because Jesus was the firstfruits of them that slept, is a virtual denial of the fact of the raising of Lazarus, of the daughter of Jairo, and the son of the widow at Nain, as also of the stories told of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament writings. What does this implicit rejection mean?

¹ *εὐχε*.

but in no case would blood and water have been poured out. Finally, we have here one of those Messianic interpretations of prophecy which, in every case, lead us away from the region of fact to that of fiction. The passage in Zechariah (xii. 10) is a mere figure or metaphor, which is here hardened into a visible incident.

The accounts of the burial of Jesus are not more harmonious. According to Matthew (xxvii. 57) a rich man named Joseph¹ of Arimathea went alone to Pilate, who gave an order that the body should be delivered to him. Joseph then wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth, and having laid it in his own new tomb hewn out of the solid rock, rolled a great stone to the door, and departed. Here, then, we see that the strength of one man suffices to move the stone. The account of Mark (xv. 42) and Luke (xxiii. 50) is much the same, the chief difference being that the act of Joseph is described by Mark as being a bold one. In the fourth Gospel we have, as usual, a very different version.

¹ The third evangelist speaks of this member of the Sanhedrim as a good and upright man who had refused to join the majority in their condemnation of Jesus (xxiii. 50, 51). These words seem to have a direct bearing on the historical trustworthiness of the repeated predictions put into the mouth of Jesus as to the details of his coming sufferings. These predictions all take the form of an invincible necessity. He *must* endure certain specified indignities, and a violent death accompanied by many marks of shame; but in this case there *must* also be agents to inflict them; and if these agents do not act of their own free will, they must be constrained by an irresistible power so to act as to bring about the things ordained 'by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God' (Acts ii. 23). Now, however unlikely, it is quite conceivable that Joseph of Arimathea might have won over the whole body of his fellow-councillors to his own opinion; and in this case there would have been no condemnation of Jesus, and therefore no violent death. There would, in short, have been a defeat of the divine counsels. But Joseph is praised here for resisting the schemes of the rest of the Sanhedrim; and as to the matter generally, they who condemned Jesus either acted as free moral agents, or they did not. If they were constrained to act so as to bring about certain predetermined results, then they were not acting freely as moral creatures, and as they could not be responsible for their acts, so neither could they be blamed for them. So far as the evangelists are concerned, there is no morality in the matter. Certain predictions must be fulfilled, and certain persons must be forthcoming to fulfil them. The inference is, that the alleged utterance of these predictions by Jesus on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem is not historical. As to the nature of the necessity proclaimed in these predictions, see Appendix B.

Far from going boldly, Joseph, 'for fear of the Jews' (xix. 38) goes secretly; and after he receives the body he is joined by Nicodemus, who brings about a hundredweight of myrrh and aloes, and helps him to wrap the body in linen clothes, and to place him in a sepulchre, never yet used, in a garden. This Johannine narrative may be soon dismissed. We have seen long ago that the conversation with Nicodemus is unhistorical, and that Nicodemus himself is a visionary personage. Hence the introduction of his name at once suffices to mark the story as a fiction. In the other Gospels there is no actual embalming, although there is an intention to embalm the body, and such a purpose implies necessarily the complete rejection, or absence, of any notion that this body would soon be restored to life. In Luke (xxiii. 56; xxiv. 1) the women set about preparing spices on their return from the grave: in Mark (xvi. 1) they do not buy the spices till the Sabbath is ended. Matthew alone has no reference to any embalming; and in this Gospel we have manifestly the earliest form of a legend which grew up while it was still remembered that the embalming of the body of Jesus really preceded his death, when the woman at Bethany 'anointed his body for the burial.'

As to the grave itself, according to the Synoptics, it is the property of Joseph, who had constructed it for himself, and in which he lays the body with all deliberation. In the fourth Gospel we have a garden, of which the other narratives make no mention, and the sepulchre is clearly not the property of Joseph. It is chosen simply from its proximity to the place of crucifixion, and because the immediate approach of the Sabbath rendered urgent haste necessary. The contradiction is complete.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATCH AT THE GRAVE

ACCORDING to a story given only in the first Gospel (xxvii. 62) the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate and informed him that, during his lifetime, Jesus the deceiver had announced that after three days he would rise from the dead. They demanded accordingly that the sepulchre should be made sure till the third day, lest the disciples should come by night and steal the body and say to the people, 'He is risen from the dead,' and thus the last error should be worse than the first. Pilate, without further comment says, 'You have a watch; go and make it as sure as you can.' The guards, thus placed, were astonished on the following morning at seeing an angel of the Lord descend from heaven and roll back the stone from the door of the sepulchre. This sight made them shake and become as dead men. The angel then told the two Maries, who had come to the sepulchre, to go and announce to the disciples that Jesus was going before them into Galilee. As they depart on this errand, some of the watch, getting the better of their terror, go into the city and show the chief priests all the things that were done. Upon this the chief priests assemble the Sanhedrim, and, after taking solemn counsel together, bribe the soldiers to say that the disciples came by night and stole the body away while they slept, promising that, if the matter should come to the governor's ears, they would persuade Pilate, and secure the guards against all punishment.

Of this notable tale the other Gospels know nothing. Let us see the several propositions stated or implied in it.

(1) It asserts that the Jewish Sanhedrim, or some of its members, had a perfect knowledge that Jesus had foretold his resurrection from the dead on the third day. But, according to Matthew and the other Synoptic writers, Jesus had not announced either his Messiahship or his sufferings, death, and resurrection even to the disciples until a comparatively late period in his ministry. It is expressly stated that they did not in the least understand the meaning of his words when he spoke of these coming events; and we have seen that the declarations in the fourth Gospel are throughout unhistorical. Thus we have the astounding phenomenon that the enemies of Jesus are perfectly acquainted with the meaning of expressions which his disciples altogether failed to understand, or refused to believe. But if so, whence did they derive their knowledge? Surely not by any process of intuition or by what is called inspiration; and if not from Jesus himself, then also, surely, not from the disciples, who, if the Gospel narratives deserve any credit, never expected any sensible resurrection. Not only do these enemies of Jesus believe these declarations, but they nowhere say or imply that they had any diabolical origin; and yet they think that they may be able to prevent their fulfilment, and to put down the teaching which they hate and dread.

(2) We infer from the story that the other evangelists knew nothing of these incidents. Yet it is inexplicable and incredible that, if they occurred, the apostles should not make the slightest reference to them in their teachings after the sensible resurrection of Jesus; but no such reference is to be found throughout the book of the Acts.

(3) We infer, further, that the fears of the two Maries, whose one perplexity is as to the weight of the stone before the sepulchre, are quite unfounded, for if the soldiers were faithful to their trust, they would not and could not have allowed the women to touch the stone; and if they were ready to connive at this, they were

quite able to remove it for them. Joseph of Arimathea, it would seem, was able to move it himself (Matt. xxvii. 60).

(4) The story also implies that the guards believed in the power of the Sanhedrim to persuade Pilate not to punish soldiers who admitted that they had committed the grave military offence of sleeping at their post. But every Roman soldier in Jerusalem must have been perfectly aware that the Sanhedrim and the governor lived in a state of chronic and cordial enmity, and, knowing this, the guards would have set a very low price on the intercessory powers of Scribes and Pharisees.

(5) But (the most astonishing circumstance of all), the story asserts that the priests and Scribes believe the report of the guards. Being up to that moment convinced that Jesus was a deceiver, and professing, of course, to put no faith in the predictions of his bodily resurrection, they now at once believe the story of the guards, and feel assured that he is risen from the dead. But unless they were all bereft of their senses (and even the history of the Acts, if in any degree trustworthy, does not exhibit them in quite so poor a light), they must in their turn have charged the soldiers with wilful and impudent lying, and have instantly informed Pilate of their breach of trust. As to the tale of the descent of the angel and the rolling away of the stone, they must have treated this as a mere blind and cheat to turn away attention from their disregard of military duty. In short, their conclusion must inevitably have been that the guard had allowed the body to be stolen, or connived at it, and that the story about the angel was simply a lie with a circumstance. Instead of this, the whole Sanhedrim, after solemn debate, agree to bribe the soldiers, necessarily as being convinced of the perfect truth of their story, and as only anxious to keep up the idea that a man was still dead whom they thoroughly well knew to be alive.

(6) It further implies that these things did not come to the governor's ears. The reader may judge for himself of the likelihood of Pilate's remaining ignorant that a prisoner whom he had crucified a few hours before, was again alive, and that a college of

seventy men had in solemn conclave bribed his guards to cheat him with a preconcerted story. The reader may further judge whether, on learning this, Pilate would have been inclined to deal more gently with the soldiers, or whether these circumstances would have placed his relations with the Sanhedrim on a more friendly footing.

Well may the story be dismissed as being not less absurd than it is false.¹ The Sanhedrim may have been dull; they would not have been so stupid as to bribe soldiers with the words here put into their mouth. How could soldiers be supposed to know what took place while, by their own admission, they were asleep? It is a malicious tale wilfully invented; and the evangelist himself supplies the clue to the growth of this fiction when he tells us that a certain saying connected with this tale was commonly reported among the Jews down to his day. This very confession is proof that the evangelist was writing after the lapse of many generations; and the saying which had thus been handed down to him, was that the disciples of Jesus had stolen away his body. But this very saying (if we allow that it was traditional), implies clearly that no guard was set, that no guard saw an angel, or returned to announce the bodily resurrection, or was bribed by the great council. If the saying originated among the Jews, it would be really an objection made by them to the assertion of a bodily resurrection, for it implies a thorough disbelief in such a resurrection, whereas the narrative of Matthew, grafted upon the saying, is based on its absolute certainty. The legend is thus traced unmistakeably to a Christian source, and belongs to a comparatively late time. The details are just those which might suggest themselves to believers, fervent in their faith or their credulity and wholly innocent of all discrimination of character.²

¹ Colenso, *Natal Sermons*, second series, sermon xi. p. 125.

² Justin, who clearly had another story before him in the 'Memorials of the Apostles,' directly charges the Jews with so slandering the Christians. 'When,' he says, 'you knew that he had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, as the prophets had foretold, not only did you not repent . . . but at that time you selected and sent forth from Jerusalem, throughout the land, chosen men, saying

that "the atheistic heresy of the Christians had arisen . . . from a certain Jesus, a Galilean impostor, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb where he had been laid, when he was unloosed from the cross, and they now deceive men, saying that he has arisen from the dead and ascended into heaven." Justin's reiterated quotation of the passage may be taken as showing that he received it from the 'Memorials of the Apostles'; but it does not prove that the story originated with non-Christian Jews. The Jews had not the right of inflicting crucifixion in the days of Pilate. See further, *Supernatural Religion*, I. 339, 343.

CHAPTER XV

THE BODILY RESURRECTION

THE narratives of the bodily resurrection exhibit, if possible, even greater inconsistencies and contradictions than those which have preceded them.

In Matthew (xxviii. 1), we read that 'Mary Magdalene and the other Mary' (*i.e.* two women), came to the sepulchre as the day began to dawn; that there was a great earthquake, and that the messenger of the Lord (one angel), came down from heaven, and, rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, sat upon it. Then, bidding the two women not to be afraid, he told them that Jesus was risen, and that his disciples should see him in Galilee, whither he had preceded them. It is added that the women obey, and depart on the errand, running in order to bring the tidings the more speedily to the disciples, and that while they are so running, Jesus himself meets them and tells them just what the angel had said to them a few minutes before, thus making the apparition and message of the angel, and perhaps also the earthquake, quite superfluous.

In the last chapter of the second Gospel, three women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome), come to the sepulchre, after the sun had risen, for the purpose of anointing the body of Jesus. As in the first Gospel, they are at a loss to know how they shall remove the stone from the door; but when they reach the spot, instead of seeing an angel sitting on the stone, they simply see it rolled on one side (of the great earthquake we hear

nothing): and it is only when they enter the sepulchre (which the women in the first Gospel do not enter), that they see one 'young man' (sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment), who gives them the same message which the angel gives to the two Marias in Matthew. But they altogether disobey the angelic command. 'Going out quickly, they fled from the tomb, for they were trembling and in ecstasy, and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid' (xv. 8). But Jesus does not meet them or stop them in their flight, and therefore, of course, gives them no message for the disciples.

In the third Gospel (xxiii. 55), we are told that the women (seemingly the large company who had come up to Jerusalem with Jesus from Galilee), visited the sepulchre very early in the morning (xxiv. 1), bringing spices for the purpose of embalming the body—they, like the women in the other Gospels, having not the slightest expectation that he would rise again. These also found the stone rolled away from the tomb, and, entering the sepulchre, they see *two* men in shining garments, who ask them why they seek the living among the dead, and remind them (of what every one of them had utterly forgotten), that Jesus had distinctly forewarned them of his sufferings, death, and bodily resurrection; but no message is given that the disciples are to go to Galilee to see Jesus, nor does Jesus appear to them himself as he does to the two Marias in Matthew. The evangelist then adds that they went and told all these things to the eleven and all the rest, and that the apostles especially received their information from Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, the names being for the third time different. Far from believing their report, the apostles deride them as babblers of nonsense.¹ Still Peter, incredulous as he is, has curiosity enough to go to the tomb, where, stooping down, he beholds the linen clothes laid by themselves, and, fully convinced by this somewhat slight evidence, departs, 'wondering in himself at that which has come to pass.'

In the fourth Gospel (xx. 1), Mary Magdalene comes alone

¹ *ἁῖνες*, Liddell and Scott, s.v., Luke xxiv. 11.

'early, when it was yet dark' (in Mark the sun had risen), and sees the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Where then was the guard who thus suffered her to approach near enough to find out, *in the dark*, that the sepulchre was open? Instead of entering the tomb, as the women do in the second and third Gospels, or seeing any angel or man, as they do in all the Synoptics, Mary Magdalene at once hastens back to Peter, James, and the beloved disciple, and informs them not that Jesus is risen, but that 'they took the Master from the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him'; thus implying that she had not gone thither alone, as stated apparently in the first verse. On hearing this, Peter and the other disciple hasten to the tomb, both running, but the other disciple outruns Peter, and, stooping down at the sepulchre door, looks in and sees the linen clothes lying, but does not go in. Peter then comes up, and, going in, sees further that the napkin which had been about the head of Jesus was not lying with the linen clothes, but was wrapped together in a place by itself. The other disciple then goes in, sees, and believes.¹ Without waiting for anything further, the two disciples go home again; but Mary lingers, weeping, not having reached their assurance of conviction; and why, we may ask, did not the two apostles, seeing her in this grief, stay to comfort her, and make her share their belief that Jesus was risen? Stooping as she wept, and looking into the sepulchre, she saw two heavenly messengers in white, who, as they came since Mary and the two disciples stood at the door, must have entered through the solid rock or earth. These angels are seated, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. In Mark the young man is seated on the right side. When they ask Mary the cause of her sorrow, she replies that it is because she knows not whither the body of Jesus has been taken. Without waiting for any further words

¹ The visit is related in words which are almost *verbatim* the same with those in which Luke records the visit of Peter, the only difference being that the credit of being the first believer in the bodily resurrection is here transferred to the beloved disciple.

from the angels, of whose real nature she seems to have no notion, Mary turns herself back and sees Jesus standing, but fails to recognise him.¹ The question of Jesus, 'Why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?' sounds to her as coming from no familiar voice; and as she looks at him she sees, apparently, nothing especially spiritual or remarkable about his person, for, supposing him to be the gardener,² she beseeches him, if he has taken the body away, to tell her where he has placed it. Jesus answers by simply calling her by her name; and the spell which has thus far held her is dissolved. Mary, turning round, greets him as Rabboni, her Master, and seemingly seeks to touch him. But although in the Synoptics Jesus, on his first appearance, allows the women to embrace his feet, here he says to Mary Magdalene, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father'; and then he gives her a message for his 'brethren,' which, however, is not a charge (as in the other Gospels) that they should return to Galilee in order to meet him, but the announcement, 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God.'

This tale is, in almost every particular, a totally different story, which excludes the Synoptic narratives; and the latter again differ from each other in most important particulars. As these, the Synoptic accounts, cannot be dismissed as less trustworthy than the fourth Gospel, the Johannine story must at once be cast aside as wholly without foundation, while the contradictions of the Synoptic narratives are such as to deprive them of all credit.

¹ In the Synoptics the women know him at once, at the mere sound of his voice, and, as in Matthew xxviii. 9, hold him by the feet and worship him.

² We may remember that, when Jesus walks on the sea of Galilee, the disciples in the boat do not recognise him until he speaks to them. So in the transfiguration he is said to have been metamorphosed before them; in other words, his form was changed. The inability of those who knew him best to recognise him is evidently increased after the resurrection. Apart from Mary Magdalene, the two disciples on the way to Emmaus fail to know him. He is, in short, polymorphic; and the reasons why he should be so are theological as well as mythical.—*Supernatural Religion*, ii. 283, 291, 293. See Appendix B.

Hence, of what is called the historical resurrection of Jesus, we have no evidence whatever.¹

Beyond this point we are in no way obliged to advance. Volumes might be filled with an examination of the pleadings of harmonists who refuse to grapple with the real question at issue, namely, the glaring inconsistencies, contradictions, impossibilities, and even deliberate and malicious fictions, in the reports of what are clearly supposed by the evangelists to be the same incidents.

¹ The theological questions involved in the terms Uprising, Anastasis, Resurrection, lie beyond the bounds of my present subject; and any detailed examination of them would, in a historical inquiry, be obviously out of place. It may be enough to remark that nothing is gained in the way of historical testimony from the belief which the Apostle Paul (in those epistles, or portions of epistles, which may be taken as genuine) expresses in a risen Christ. He nowhere speaks of the uprising as historical. We may further note that the term *resurrection* is ambiguous. Mr. Maurice, in his *Theological Essays*, viii., believing firmly in the uprising, denies distinctly that the material particles deposited in the grave are ever reanimated. Butler, in his *Analogy*, maintains seemingly the same position. According to him the body is a living power, and living powers cannot be destroyed. Hence the moment of the change which we call death is the moment of Anastasis, or rising up from the dead. It is strange that the *Analogy* of Butler should have been for generations used familiarly in the schools of Oxford without any marked attention being called to his most significant statements. It may now be some thirty years ago since Dr. Tait thought it to be his duty to speak of some of the London clergy as 'not believing in the resurrection of Christ.' Dr. Tait, of course, knew that any one may accept heartily the whole argument in the first chapter of Butler's *Analogy*, and, at the same time, reject not less emphatically, as a string of fables, the stories related in the Gospels of a material reanimation of what we call the dead body of Jesus. It was impossible that the thinking portion of his clergy, who had critically examined these narratives, could put faith in a series of absolute contradictions; and if they have before them only a number of stories which are throughout inconsistent with each other, it is obvious that they have no historical grounds for saying that they believe in some physical resurrection, the conditions of which were quite different from those recorded in the Gospels.

CHAPTER XVI

APPEARANCES OF JESUS AFTER THE BODILY RESURRECTION

IF we accept the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles as trustworthy, the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection of his body extended over forty days, at the end of which time he ascended visibly from Mount Olivet into the heavens. For so long a period, the appearances were but few in number, and for the most part they were but momentary. He comes, utters a few words, and vanishes, the words being commonly utterances similar to those made before his passion. The chief exception is the conversation with the two disciples on their Sabbath day's journey to Emmaus; but although this extends apparently over some hours, it is only just before he vanishes that they recognise his countenance and form. We must look at each Christophany separately.

In the first Gospel (xxvi. 32) Jesus is described as saying to his disciples that, after he is risen again, he will go before them into Galilee; nor does he say anything to them about appearances elsewhere. In accordance with this the angel of the Lord is represented as bidding the women go quickly and tell the disciples that 'he goes before you into Galilee. There shall ye see him; lo, I have told you.' These words imply, with the utmost clearness, that they were not to see him except in Galilee, or at the least not until they had returned into Galilee; and, in further accordance with this idea, we are informed (after the episode about the Roman guards and the Sanhedrim) that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, where, we are told now for the first time, that Jesus had pointed out a particular mountain as the place of meeting (Matt. xxviii. 16). The Gospel closes with the statement that

Jesus appeared to them there, and charged them to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Breath. Nothing is said about the ascension of Jesus, or about any later appearances in Galilee or elsewhere.

Thus, taking verses 6-9 along with verses 16-20, we have a coherent narrative; but in verses 9, 10 we have what seems evidently to be a later insertion. Whether it be so or not, this much is certain, that they inform us of an apparition of Jesus, who simply repeats the message just given to the women by the angel; and we may reasonably ask the purpose of this manifestation. It assuredly was not needed to remove any disbelief on the part of the women, for they are described as running to bear to the disciples the tidings which they had received from the angel. In the first Gospel, then, we have only one appearance of Jesus to the disciples; and this takes place on a distant Galilean hill. Of any renewal of the old intercourse we hear nothing. The charge to preach and to baptize is given, and the Gospel comes to an end; but not without the significant statement that, at this solitary manifestation, 'some doubted' (xxviii. 17).

In the second Gospel (xvi. 2), as we have seen, Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James, with Salome, come to the tomb with spices very early on the first day of the week, but after the rising of the sun. There they see the angel, or young man, whose command that they should announce to the disciples the tidings of the resurrection they disobey from sheer terror. They say nothing to any one; and we have here, thus far, no manifestation of the risen Jesus. At this point the readers of the Revised Version are informed that the last eleven verses of this chapter may perhaps be spurious. The two oldest Greek manuscripts omit these verses, and other copies exhibit a different supplement. But this is of very slight importance. What is noteworthy is, that these concluding verses profess to give a history of all that follows the burial of Jesus. First (xvi. 9), after his rising he appeared to Mary Magdalene, who goes to those who had been with him; and these, as they mourned and wept, refused to believe

her story (v. 11). He next appeared in another form¹ to two of them as they walked on their way into the country. So far, this looks like a tradition which Luke may have expanded into the narrative of the journey to Emmaus. But when these go and tell the news to the rest, they obtain no more credit than Mary Magdalene. Then follows the third manifestation to the eleven themselves, as they sat at meat. On this occasion he upbraids them with their unbelief and hardness of heart; and then proceeds to give them his final charge about the preaching of the Gospel throughout all the world. When these commands have been given, Jesus, we are told, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Here we have no notes of time; but as Mary Magdalene is certainly described as being at this time at Jerusalem with the rest of the company, it would follow that the three manifestations in these concluding verses of the second Gospel all took place at or near Jerusalem, and on the same day, the ascension immediately following the third. We have seen that the first evangelist makes no mention of any ascension. Here we have an ascension which takes place on the day of the resurrection. The concluding statement is that they went forth and preached everywhere, 'the Master working with them and confirming the word by the signs which followed,' thus implying that there was no Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, or, at all events, that the apostles or missionaries of Jesus were immediately, after that outpouring, scattered in all parts of the world—a statement explicitly contradicted and excluded by the whole narrative of the Acts of the Apostles.

In the third Gospel, we are informed distinctly that on the very day of the resurrection (xxiv. 13) two of them left Jerusalem to walk to the village of Emmaus, distant about seven miles,² and that, while they were discussing recent events, Jesus drew near to them; but their eyes were holden (*i.e.* a preternatural power held

¹ See p. 454, note 2.

² The narrative so far agrees with Mark xvi. 12. In both there are two disciples: both leave Jerusalem early on the morning of the first day of the week; and both walk into the country. But of the sequel Mark says nothing.

them, xxiv. 16), so that they could not recognise him. When Jesus asks them the subject of their sorrowful conversation, they express their surprise at his ignorance, and add that in the crucified Jesus they had hoped to find 'him who should have redeemed Israel,' thus clearly implying the extinction of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and their continued disbelief or forgetfulness of his reiterated and detailed predictions on the last journey from Galilee to the holy city. They then tell him of the report of the women and of Peter as something to which they gave no credence. Jesus, then, it is said, rebuked them as fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken, and pointed out to them that the Christ or Messiah must suffer these things and so enter into his glory; and then, 'beginning at Moses and all the prophets,' he expounded to them 'in all the writings the things concerning himself.' Still they make no sign either of recognition or even of surprise; and yet, if they were at all like other men, they must have had many things to answer to him. Is it possible that they could fail to express their wonder that the stranger who was thus learned in Messianic interpretation should profess total ignorance¹ of the events which had within the last few days occurred in Jerusalem? Is it possible that they could fail to retort, 'Who art thou, that knowest all these things so well, and hast reached a faith far beyond that which we have been able to attain? Thou art a believer in Jesus more fervent and thorough than we have been; whence did thy conviction come?' Instead of this, all that we are told is that they journeyed on together, and that, on reaching the village, Jesus made as though he would have gone further, but, at their entreaty, he went into a house to tarry with them. There, as he sat at meat with them, he was made known to them in breaking of bread, and 'vanished out of their sight.'²

¹ If he had known some, he would have known all. If he did not know all, he would know none. There had been two, or more, severe earthquakes; and these are not, commonly, forgotten in a few moments.

² There are laws which determine the recognition, or non-recognition, of one man by another. We do not forget those with whom we were in familiar intercourse a few days ago; and these disciples had been parted from their Master not

Leaving for a while the narrative in itself, we may note particularly that the two disciples rose up *the same hour* (the day being still that of the resurrection), and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven gathered together and heard that Jesus had been seen by Simon. They then told their own tale; and *as they spoke* (*i.e.* still on the day of the resurrection), Jesus himself stood in the midst and greeted them with the salutation of peace. Then seeing that they took him for a spectre,¹ he bade them handle him and see, and showed them his hands and his feet, thus implying distinctly that his feet had been nailed as well as his hands. He then ate before them a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb; after which, opening their mind that they might understand the Scriptures or writings, he spoke to them in the same tone of thought which had marked his words to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Here, as in the previous Gospels, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached among all nations; but nothing is said of baptism or of the baptismal formula given in the first Gospel; and, instead of a command enjoining immediate departure for Galilee, the disciples are bidden to tarry in Jerusalem till they be endued with power from on high. The evangelist then adds that Jesus led them out as far as Bethany (clearly, *still on the day of the resurrection*), and thence ascended up to heaven. The disciples, we are told, did obeisance to him, and, returning to Jerusalem with great joy, were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

Here we have to remark especially that all reference to manifestations in Galilee has vanished. The angels or messengers from

eight-and-forty hours. That they should not be reminded of him during his long exposition, is altogether incredible. It is true that after his disappearance they ask each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and opened to us the writings?' This, however, implies no recognition. It merely expresses the depth of feeling stirred up by his comments. In fact, if we keep to the story, they had, up to the last moment, not even the remotest suspicion that the speaker was Jesus himself.

¹ Literally, 'took him for a breath,' the word is *πνεῦμα*, *spiritus*. In the story of the walking on the sea, Mark vi. 49, it is *φάντασμα*. But we cannot argue from such words.

heaven do not tell the women to inform the disciples that Jesus is going before them into Galilee; and, as in Mark, the appearances to Simon, to the two disciples, and to the eleven, are either in Jerusalem or in its immediate neighbourhood. The journey of the eleven to Galilee in the first Gospel (xxviii. 16) is altogether excluded, and the disciples are expressly commanded to remain in the holy city.

Thus at once we have before us two wholly contradictory narratives, one of which *must* and both of which *may* be false. It is demonstrably certain that if the eleven journeyed into Galilee, according to the bidding of Jesus before his passion, and of the angel after his bodily resurrection, they could not at the same time have remained in Jerusalem, which in Luke they are said to have done.

In the fourth Gospel, we have (as we have already in part seen) a narrative wholly irreconcilable with that of either of the Synoptics, in which the women to whom he first appears embrace and hold him by the feet. Here Mary Magdalene is charged not to touch him, because he has not yet ascended to his Father. But as Jesus bids her go and say that he is ascending¹ to his Father and to their Father, to his God and their God (xxii. 17), and as in a subsequent interview he allows Thomas to handle him, it seems to follow that, according to the Johannine evangelist, the ascension must have taken place at some time between these two manifestations—in other words, that some of the Christophanies took place after the ascension.

The scene described in John xx. 19 is apparently the same as that which is spoken of in Mark xvi. 11, and Luke xxiv. 36, the time being the same in each, namely, the evening of the day of the bodily resurrection. But the expression in the Johannine narrative that, 'when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, Jesus came and stood in the midst,' implies seemingly that Jesus passed through the doors or walls. At this visit Jesus gives his apostles, as in the Synoptics, certain final commands, and endows

¹ ἀναβαίτω.

them with certain powers; but the mode in which they are given differs altogether. There is no command to go into all the world and preach the good news to every creature; not the least hint that they are to exercise the power of working physical or palpable miracles or marvels; and even the third Gospel tells us merely that repentance and remission of sins must be preached in the name of Jesus. In the fourth Gospel, the announcement of remission has resumed a shape which seems to favour what is popularly known as the power of the keys (xx. 23).¹ Nor is anything said, in the other Gospels, of the gesture or sign which accompanies the imparting of this power in the Johannine story. It cannot, indeed, be too carefully noted that, according to this evangelist, the apostles, as Jesus breathes on them, then and thereby, as his words tell them, receive all the affluence of the Holy Breath which they need for the due discharge of their exalted office; and thus the fourth Gospel virtually excludes that story of the Pentecostal outpouring which we have only in the Acts of the Apostles.

It must, further, be remarked that as in Luke, so here, all the manifestations of Jesus take place in Jerusalem, and that except in the confessedly doubtful supplementary chapter (xxi.) not a word is said about journeys to, or appearances in, Galilee; and thus we are brought to the question of the genuineness of this concluding record. For us this question resolves itself into the simple inquiry whether it was written by the author who drew up the previous chapters; and the topic is certainly one of very slight significance or interest. The utterly unhistorical character of the whole Gospel has been amply shown; and it matters little whether a few more unhistorical statements be or be not appended to it, whether by the same or by any other hand.

¹ I do not question the wisdom and the beauty of Dean Stanley's treatment of this subject, *Christian Institutions*, chapter vii. But here the apostles are, by the inspiration of Jesus (*ἐνφύσησεν*), invested with a power to be exercised by them personally: and I think it can scarcely be questioned that this statement of the fourth Gospel is thrown into a form favourable to the growth of the sacerdotal theory.

Nor must it be forgotten that, in regard to all these latter narratives, our task was virtually ended with the examination of the so-called trial before Pilate, when we found that the reports of every incident belonging to that trial were throughout irreconcilable, and that, in such tales as that of the Sanhedrim and the guards, we have to deal with transparent fictions. If we have not a shred of evidence for the physical or sensible resurrection there described, it is manifestly a work of supererogation to examine accounts which relate appearances after that event. This superfluous task we have undertaken; and the result is only to show that the later stories are as shadowy and self-contradictory as any that have preceded them.

It becomes, therefore, quite unnecessary to examine the so-called appendix to the Johannine Gospel. Yet it is in itself curious as a storehouse for the symbolical theology of later ages, and as exhibiting the growth of a tone of thought which marks the more complete development of the Christian Church. We have first the parallelism between the incidents here described and those which accompanied the first calling of Peter in the fifth chapter of the third Gospel. But there the number of fishes in the marvellous draught was indefinite, and the net broke. Here they are one hundred and fifty and three, and in spite of their size the net is not broken—a favourite topic with those who wish to draw a contrast between the Church triumphant and the Church as militant here, with the meshes of its net broken by the crowd of good and bad fish inclosed within it. It is scarcely worth while to remark that here, as in the Synoptics, Jesus asks for food and eats it before his disciples.

From the fifteenth verse onwards the remainder of the chapter is taken up with a narrative of the three questions put to Peter, demanding a threefold assertion of his love and loyalty, to compensate his threefold denial in the house of the high priest, and also with a reference to the future fortunes of Peter and the beloved or nameless disciple. But although the lapse of Peter is thus closely brought home to him, nothing is said about the

denial and desertion which, as we have seen, Justin extends to the whole body of the apostles. The idea of the almost immediate return of the Messiah to judgement still so far retains its force that the beloved disciple is represented as probably, or possibly, living to see it—a singular comment on the assertion that the generation alive during the ministry of Jesus should not pass away till all be fulfilled. Whether the words which describe the closing scenes in the life of Peter refer to his alleged death by crucifixion, or to the mere weakness of old age which sometimes needs the support of a guide, is a matter of very little consequence and of very slight interest. When the whole story is apocryphal, it matters little what becomes of subordinate details.

We have thus already three contradictory narratives of the period following the crucifixion. To these must be added the story in the first chapter of the Acts,¹ which differs from all of them. In this book we are informed that the period during which the Christophanies were vouchsafed was extended precisely to forty days; that during this period Jesus was seen to be alive by many infallible proofs—these proofs, however, as we are told (x. 41), being given not to all the people, but to a few chosen witnesses; and that, at the end of this time, while they still looked for the immediate restoration of the temporal kingdom of Israel (i. 6), he led them out as far as Mount Olivet, and there, having charged them that they should not depart from Jerusalem until the promise of the Father had been fulfilled, was taken up even as they looked on him, and a cloud received him out of their sight.²

In this narrative, as in that of Mark and Luke, all reference to Galilee is pointedly excluded, and Jerusalem is the one theatre of

¹ The question of the authorship and authority of this book has already been carefully examined.

I do not know that I have there omitted anything which is material to the question now before us.

² With him, according to Dean Alford, ascended the whole company of the saints whose sepulchres were opened at the earthquake which attended the death of Jesus. See p. 442.

all the Christophanies. But the account of the Acts is, further, the only one which relates in detail a visible ascension from the ground to a celestial abode supposed to be raised above it, and to the throne on which, by the common anthropomorphic conception, God the Father sits eternally. In Mark we have merely the statement that 'after the Master had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God.' In Luke we are told that he was parted from the disciples while in the act of blessing them, and was borne up into the heaven. In Matthew and John there is no reference to any visible ascension. But the writer of the Acts has learnt that, while the disciples stood gazing up into heaven after Jesus, two men had placed themselves¹ by their side, clothed in white raiment. Whence they came we are not told; but nothing is said of a visible descent from heaven, or of any aerial apparition, as in the case of the angelic hosts seen in the sky over Bethlehem. These 'men' tell the disciples, 'This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven;' but there is no explicit assurance that the generation then living should not pass away till all be fulfilled. Without further questioning these men the disciples returned to Jerusalem, and there waited until the Spirit was poured out upon them on the feast of Pentecost.

The absence of any definite promise that the return to judgement shall take place within the lifetime of those then living tends to show the comparative lateness of this composition. The writer of the first letter to the Thessalonians, who is probably not Paul, is under the impression (iv. 15) that some, at least, of those to whom he was writing would be alive at the Parousia, or second advent of Jesus, and would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This drawing upwards from the earth would be the lot, it is said, of all saints who may then be living throughout the whole world; and we have to face the astronomical difficulty which renders these passages worthless for those who have but a slender knowledge

¹ παρεστήκεισαν, i. 10.

of modern astronomy. As long as the earth was regarded as a flat plane, and the heaven was conceived as a solid firmament in which the stars were fixed, and beneath which the planets moved as in grooved courses, it was easy enough to suppose that the inhabitants of the earth, if drawn up from it, might converge to a focus in the upper air. But when the earth is known to be spherical, when it is perceived that the idea of a solid firmament is a delusion, and that height and depth in reference to the stars or the earth are purely relative terms, it becomes the merest absurdity to speak of heaven as placed at some definite spot above the earth, or of the inhabitants of a sphere rising at the same time from all parts of that sphere to a common centre placed at some distance above it. The Copernican system implies that such a drawing-up of people from all parts of the earth at the same time would result in an infinite divergence. It follows, that such a convening of the saints as is described in this letter to the Thessalonians is impossible, and hence that the whole eschatology¹ of the New Testament writings is without foundation, for there is clearly no warrant whatever for saying that, although the visible manifestation in the clouds and the visible converging to a common centre in the upper air cannot take place, yet the great truth of a chronologically contemporaneous judgement of mankind remains untouched. It is not so. These features are of the very essence of the early Christian idea; and if we reject them the whole notion falls to the ground. It may be true, and it is true, that the rejection of this ancient eschatology cannot affect the righteous judgement of God, as exercised whether in this life or any other; but assuredly it destroys the idea of that visible spectacle which the Latin Church has imaged in its sombre hymn, the *Dies Iræ*.

For this reason alone we are absolved from the necessity of examining the narrative of the Acts historically. If there be no solid heaven, if there be no one particular spot where God immediately dwells, if the bare idea of such a thing be absurd, it follows irresistibly that the visible ascent of Jesus from Mount

¹ See Appendix F.

Olivet is as impossible as the great gathering spoken of in the Epistle to the Thessalonians. Any further scrutiny is thus doubly superfluous. The Gospel narratives of the resurrection being shown to be unhistorical, the narrative of events in the life of Jesus later than the resurrection loses at once all historical value. It is not worth while, therefore, to waste many words on the attempts which have been made to present, in the form of a coherent narrative, the contradictory accounts of the Christophanies. The assertion that when Jesus, according to Luke's account, charged the disciples to remain at Jerusalem, he did not mean to exclude slight walks or excursions (such as the journey to Galilee) is pardonable, only because it is clearly a last despairing effort to evade an insurmountable difficulty. Far from being a slight walk or excursion, the journey from Jerusalem to Galilee was nearly the longest which a Jew could undertake within the limits of his own country; and it is demonstrably certain that if Jesus had intended his disciples to remain in Jerusalem till after Pentecost, he could not possibly have enjoined them to go to Galilee in order to see him for the first time after the resurrection.

By commanding them to return to Galilee, Jesus was, in fact, commanding them to return home; and it can scarcely be doubted that the tradition embodied in Matthew xxviii. (excluding verses 9-15) is the oldest. This tradition assigned the Christophany (for at this stage there was seemingly but one) to Galilee. But as time went on, a natural desire sprang up to show that Jesus had manifested his victory over bodily death in the very place where he had appeared to be overcome by it; and as the church at Jerusalem was more developed and consolidated, so was it also natural to put into the mouth of Jesus words which would describe that city as the centre from which the various Christian missions should radiate. In Matthew (xxviii. 16-20) it is clearly from Galilee that the apostles are charged to set out on their journeys for the conversion of the Gentiles. We should thus have two sets of Christophanies, for those in Galilee would not necessarily be superseded by the manifestations in or near Jerusalem. They

might, indeed, be multiplied indefinitely ; and accordingly we have, in the so-called appendix to the Johannine Gospel, the account of a Galilæan Christophany not found in any of the Synoptic narratives.

It would be easy to point out other difficulties ; but the task is almost as superfluous as that of carrying owls to Athens. In the first Gospel (xxviii. 7) the heavenly messenger or angel distinctly charges the women to bid the disciples journey into Galilee in order that they may see Jesus. If these words have any meaning, they imply that they would not see him until they reached Galilee. Who sends to a friend in England a message that he should join him weeks hence in Italy, if he purposes on the same day on which he sends his message to call at that friend's house in London ? The command enjoining the journey into Galilee clearly excludes the idea of any earlier Christophany in Jerusalem, and belongs to an earlier time than that in which a belief in other manifestations sprang up. No human ingenuity can show that the two ideas could have grown up side by side. If Jesus was to appear to the disciples in Jerusalem on the first day of the week, the angel must have told them, not that they must go into Galilee to meet him, but that they should see him where they then were before the sun went down.

Lastly, it may be worth while to remark that the notions of the evangelists, in this portion of their work especially, betray a supreme carelessness as to the laws or conditions which regulate the sensible universe. They know nothing about them, and manifestly wish to know nothing about them. The body of Jesus after his resurrection may be embraced and handled ; it has flesh and bones, and it can eat and drink ; but it passes through walls or closed doors, or, rather, appears in a room of which the doors are closed ; and, doing this, it can vanish instantaneously at his will. Space is for him no difficulty, and time is not needed for the prosecution of journeys over the tangible earth. The truth is, that we are dealing with conceptions precisely similar in kind with those of angelic visitants in Genesis and other Old Testament writings. These visitants may be seen walking, and may also be

seen to eat, and are also palpable, and able to apply bodily force, as when they drag Lot within his house and shut his door against the angry crowd outside; but although they can do these things, they are not trammelled by the conditions of human life. Eating and locomotion are for them no necessities, but merely visionary operations performed for the benefit of mortal men. With this conclusion one whole class of expressions used in the Gospels corresponds with singular closeness. The appearances of Jesus after his resurrection are all spoken of, strictly, as visions. The phrase in Acts (i. 3)¹ is just one which would be used to describe any phantasy or mere optical impression as distinguished from the sight of a real object in the material or phenomenal world.² We have, in short, a number of phrases which point only to visionary manifestations, and with these a number of statements which apply to all living men. The two notions are antagonistic; but the evangelists were manifestly unaware of the conflict; and we must take their ideas and statements as we find them.

After all that has been already said, it may seem almost useless to advert to other difficulties in these narratives, which yet may be multiplied almost indefinitely. We may notice, in passing, the fact that the parting commands of Jesus differ widely in the several narratives. In one, we have a charge to preach repentance and remission of sins 'in the name of Jesus'; in another, a charge to baptize all nations 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' a formula which is, apparently, unheeded in the Acts, where the apostles are represented as baptizing always 'into the name of the Lord Jesus.' The contradiction is fatal; but in the same way, we have, as we have already seen in the Johannine Gospel, an imparting of the Spirit by the breath of Jesus, while, in the Acts, this has grown into a separate incident subsequent to the ascension, and his breathing has become 'a rushing mighty wind.'

¹ *ὁπταζόμενος*.

² The word used in Luke xxiv. 34, and by the writer of 1 Cor. xv., is *ὥφθη*, a word of the same kind, with which we must class the *ἐφάνη* and *ἐφανερώθη* of Mark.

How these narratives, unhistorical as they have been shown to be, came into existence, or assumed their present form, it is not our business to explain; and once again, at the end of my task, as at the beginning and throughout it, I must emphatically disclaim the obligation. Whether a reasonable hypothesis may be advanced to explain their growth, or whether it may not, the narratives are not narratives of historical fact. With regard to the records of incidents subsequent to the bodily or sensible resurrection, we can but say that the seemingly earlier forms of the tradition give no precise period during which Christophanies were vouchsafed, and, indeed, appear to limit them to the one day of the resurrection itself, which is also the day of ascension. But as the manifestations were multiplied in the conception of the disciples, it was natural to extend them to the period suggested by the fact of the forty days immediately succeeding his baptism. If, however, he once appeared to the outward senses of his disciples as a conqueror over physical death, or, as it is called, the grave, he must vanish unseen, or depart from them visibly, to resume his majesty in heaven. Our Canonical Gospels give us, chiefly, the former notion: the latter is found in the Acts, and it carries us at once to the ascent of Elijah on the fiery chariot. As in that narrative the descent of his prophetic powers on Elisha is made to depend on Elisha's seeing his master taken up, so here the disciples are represented as standing with Jesus and as gazing upwards while he rises from earth into the heaven.

CHAPTER XVII

ALLEGED WITNESS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL TO THE FACT OF THE HISTORICAL RESURRECTION

IT has been asserted with supreme confidence that, although the Canonical Gospels, in spite of some difficult or perplexing statements, are trustworthy and accurate historical narratives, yet, if they had all been lost, the practical difference to Christendom would not have been overwhelming. As things are, it is urged that, in these Gospels, we have the testimony of twelve men whose sincerity and truthfulness cannot be questioned, and on whose authority every incident related in these records is to be received as indubitable historical fact. The loss of these Gospels, together with the Acts of the Apostles, might deprive us of the witness of these twelve men; but this loss would be by no means irreparable, for we could then fall back upon the evidence of one who, in every sense, was their equal, and who, in a certain sense, was superior to them all. Although the genuineness of much in the Canonical books of the New Testament writings has been called into question, that of the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, has, it is argued, never been doubted; and it is in the first letter to the Corinthians that we have a solemn statement of the apostle Paul himself, which completely establishes the truth of the universal belief of the Christian church in the (bodily, or physical, or phenomenal, or sensible) resurrection, or anastasis, of Jesus of Nazareth. This authoritative guarantee covers the whole time from the arrest of Jesus in the garden to the manifestation vouch-

safed many years later to the apostle himself. The passage in question, we are told, gives 'a very circumstantial account' not only 'of the testimony on which the belief in the resurrection rested,' but also of the events to which that testimony is held to relate. This passage, in the first letter to the Corinthians (xv. 3-8), runs as follows:—'For I gave over to you among (the) first things that which I also took from (others), that Christ died on account of our errors according to the writings, and that he was buried, and that he has been raised on the third day according to the writings, and that he became visible to Kephas, then to the twelve. Then he was made visible to above five hundred brethren once for all, of whom the more remain till now, but some also fell asleep. Then he became manifest to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as it were to the child untimely born, he became visible to me also.'

With reference to these sentences two questions at once suggest themselves. Can the account here given be legitimately regarded as in a high degree circumstantial? If it may, from whom does the account come? The genuineness of the passage cannot, it is clear, be assumed as wholly beyond reach of challenge, unless it be first proved that it is found in a book the text of which has never been tampered with; and this is a proposition which can scarcely be maintained with regard to any one of the New Testament writings. This question of genuineness will be forced upon us in the sequel. For the present, we must examine the passage on the assumption that it is the writing of the great missionary of the Gentiles.

At starting, then, we have to note that the writer of these sentences affirms, at most, one fact only, of all that he mentions, on his own knowledge or experience or authority. All the rest, he says, that he has in some way or other taken over or received; and as he does not claim to have received it in any particular way, we must conclude that he received the knowledge of these incidents just as we receive the knowledge of any events of which we are not eye-witnesses—that is, from the testimony of others. It is true that

in his letter to the Galatians (i. 12) he does lay claim to having received his mission as a preacher of the good news of God, and his knowledge of those good tidings, in a special and peculiar manner. But this is a knowledge of no historical incidents, but of eternal truths, and of the divine purpose in regard to all moral and responsible creatures. It was brought home to him that he was to preach the universal love of God for all; and this lesson he declares that he learnt without any human intervention, but by the immediate action of the divine spirit. There is no pretence, and no colour, for the assertion that the revelation was a revelation of historical events, or that it was anything which needed human witness in any way. The sentences which are supposed to give 'a very circumstantial account of the testimony upon which the belief in the resurrection rested' deal only with historical events; and if the writer was the apostle Paul, they are events of which (with the exception of the last) he had no personal knowledge at all. The evidence, therefore, whatever it be, does not come to us from Paul at first-hand; but if even we allow that it did, have we here the faintest corroboration of the narratives of the resurrection as given in our Canonical Gospels? The answer is, that we have here nothing more than a bare statement that certain persons who believed Jesus to have died on the cross, affirmed, or are said to have affirmed, that after his death they had seen him alive. Of the actual reanimation of the dead body not one word is said.

But of the events thus related at second-hand we have the significant assertion that they took place because they *must* take place, 'according to the writings'; and thus we are thrust back on one of the greatest difficulties involved in the accounts of the later portion of the ministry.¹ What those writings may have been, or whether there were any writings, we can scarcely venture to say. If they were those to which the evangelists refer us, they are all misquoted or misinterpreted, and, in short, make no reference whatever to a bodily resurrection.

The writer of these sentences, whether he be Paul or any other,

¹ See Appendix B.

merely says, in the passage, that he had heard of six Christophanies over and beyond the one vouchsafed to himself. He does not say from whom he received his information as to the rest. He does not say that he took any pains to sift it or to verify it, or that he even saw any need for so doing. Beyond the mere assertion of the Christophanies we have literally nothing. But he seems to give the list in what looks as if it were meant to be a chronological order; and in this case the first Christophany was vouchsafed to Peter. It is not so vouchsafed in any of the Gospels; and to say that the manifestations to the women are purposely left out of Paul's list because the apostle had some peculiar notions as to the proper position of women in the church, is really to impute to him dishonesty of the worst sort, and might almost tempt us to abandon the inquiry in disgust. In Luke only, after the return of the two disciples from Emmaus, is it said that 'the Master was risen and made visible to Simon' (xxiii. 34). Not one of the other evangelists takes the least notice of this manifestation.

The next Christophany is said to be given to the twelve; and this incident has been by many identified with the manifestation recorded in John (xx. 19), Luke (xxiv. 36), and again, some urge, in the fourth Gospel (xx. 26). As no particulars are given, it may be rash either to affirm or to deny; but in any case it was a manifestation, not to the twelve, but to the eleven. The inconsistency is, perhaps, not insignificant.¹ As to the manifestation to five hundred or more at once, it is nowhere else mentioned. Harmonisers have insisted that it is the instance mentioned in Matthew (xxviii. 16); but the evangelist there speaks of the presence only of the eleven, some of whom, it is said, doubted. It seems a strange thing thus to read into the story the presence of five hundred, or more, men who are not mentioned in the text as it has come down to us. The absence of all other reference to a Christophany on so large a scale is surely a circumstance altogether

¹ See Appendix D. We can scarcely insist on the number twelve, unless we commit ourselves to the version followed by the writer of the Gospel of Peter, which cannot be said to leave room for the treachery of Judas, or any other of the twelve.

more suspicious.¹ Are all others silent, because they had never heard of it? How could this be? Or is it because the great assembly was not unanimous in thinking that they saw the risen Master? Again, when did this Christophany take place? and where? When Matthias was chosen to fill the place of Judas Iscariot, the whole number of believers is said to have been about a hundred and twenty. The plea that the incident took place in Jerusalem, when the number was swelled by the influx of pilgrims from Galilee and other parts, is pure guessing for which there is not the faintest groundwork or warrant. From the statement that most of these five hundred survived at the time when these sentences were written down, we can extract nothing. The writer does not say that he questioned any of them, or even had seen any of them; and certainly they were beyond the reach of examination by the Corinthians. As to the vision to James, no notice is taken of it in our Gospels or in the Acts. Jerome, however, tells a tale that James had made a vow that he would not touch bread until he had seen his risen Master; and that, accordingly, Jesus came, and, ordering bread to be brought, broke it, and gave it to James. This is certainly not history; and the appearance next recorded as having been granted to all the apostles looks much as if it were simply the second mention of the vision which, in the fifth verse, is said to be vouchsafed to the twelve.

If, then, these sentences be the work of the great apostle of the Gentiles, with what authority do they come, as coming from him?

¹ We must bear in mind, throughout, that all these alleged facts have, according to this narrative, come to Paul by tradition—that is, from men of a generation older than his own. We are thus at once plunged into contradictions. The Christophany vouchsafed to Paul himself in 1 Cor. xv. 8 is a part of the *παράληψις* and *παράδοσις* mentioned in the third verse. But in Galat. i. 11, 12, Paul denies absolutely that there is any *παράληψις* in his own case. The Christophany to himself (if it be a fact at all) is a fact of his own experience; and to make Paul speak of this as received by him only betrays the clumsiness of the forger. Again, the manifestation to the five hundred is part of a *παράδοσις* as it comes to himself. In other words, the five hundred also belong to a former generation. But, according to the sixth verse, most of them are still alive, and capable of being questioned; only they never are. All that we can gather from this is that the passage is forged.

Have we any reason whatever for supposing that he ever bestowed a moment's historical criticism on matters in which his sympathies were stirred? Can we suppose that he ever examined stories of wonders, if they were put before him? Certainly the incidents which we have thus far noticed, do not fall within his own experience. From whom, then, did he gain his information? Did he get it from the chosen witnesses mentioned in the Acts (x. 41)? On this special point we may say that we have something like a definite answer from Paul himself. In his letter to the Galatians he sets down, exhaustively, all the occasions on which he had any intercourse with any of the apostles, and they amount to nothing more than this—three years, at the least, after what we call his conversion, he went to Jerusalem to put questions to Peter, and spent a fortnight with him. His errand was, indeed, a momentous one; and we have not the slightest ground for supposing that his questions included any on the subject of long past Christophanies; nor is there a word to imply that the matter was one which had for him any interest whatever. He tells us, further, that he saw none of the other apostles, and, therefore, he clearly could have no conversations with them on this or any other subject (Gal. i. 19). Fourteen years later he again went to Jerusalem; and the business which brought him there would, manifestly, leave no time for cross-examining any of the apostles in reference to these Christophanies.¹

It comes, then, to this, that if these sentences are from Paul they give us only second-hand information, obtained we know not from whom; and it is information as to which not the least reliance could be placed on his judgement. The truth of the singularly solemn defence given of himself in the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, cannot be questioned. His honesty in dealing with the question of the Charismata cannot be doubted, although he not merely confesses candidly his belief in the reality of the gift of tongues, but puts forth his own claim to the possession of it in extraordinary measure. But when he comes to visions and revelations of the Lord,² we can but wait in patience, while he

¹ I have already dealt carefully with this subject, Book I. chapter i.

² 2 Cor. xii. 1.

tells us of the unspeakable words which he heard when caught up into the third heaven. Here, however, a question forces itself upon us, the importance of which cannot easily be exaggerated. How can we tell that a man given to such dreams would be careful and impartial in the sifting of evidence for the bodily rising of the great Master, whose good news of an all-embracing love it was his duty and his joy to make known to all the world? In detecting notions or methods which were really opposed to this universalism, his insight was indescribably keen and exact; but as to the occurrence, or the non-occurrence, of alleged past incidents, he probably had no idea that any laws of evidence existed. Without care and impartiality in the testing of evidence, his mere acceptance of the assertions of others adds nothing to their value. Nothing is said in these sentences about the ascension. Are we to suppose that for the writer the anastasis and the ascension were one act?¹ That this was the belief of the apostle himself there can be no doubt.

After giving the list of Christophanies,² the writer goes on to speak of the vision granted to himself. But he simply names it as he names the others. He gives no details in his own case, as he had given none in the other, while yet he is seemingly made to declare that he has received from others his knowledge of a fact coming within the range of his own experience. Of the time, place, or mode of the manifestation he says not a word. The term used³ is applied to all alike; and we may therefore conclude that the writer put all the manifestations on the same footing. Paul, it is true, asks, 'Have I not seen the Lord?'⁴ and connects with this condition his mission to the Gentiles; but then, even if we take him to refer to mere bodily vision, he merely states that he saw him, without adding a single detail. We are thus thrown back on the narrative in the ninth chapter of the Acts. But this narrative does not say that Paul saw Jesus, although it implies

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 498.

² If Paul was one of the accusers of Stephen, it is strange that he should not have included in this list the Christophany said to have been vouchsafed to the protomartyr. Stephen is made distinctly to assert the fact (Acts vii. 56).

³ ὁφθῆναι.

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 1. The genuineness of the clause remains an open question.

that he heard him. What it says is, that he fell to the ground on being smitten by the dazzling effulgence around him; that he heard a voice; and that when he rose up, he was blind. It is plain beyond doubt that Paul did not see him. Of this story it is almost enough to say that Paul makes no reference to it in any of his genuine letters; nor, indeed, is any such reference found in any of the letters which bear his name. When he speaks of its pleasing God to reveal his Son in him, in order that he might preach him among the Gentiles, it is nothing less than absurd to suppose that he must be referring to the blinding vision which, according to the story of the Acts, he is said to have seen on the road to Damascus. He is not necessarily speaking of anything beyond the great spiritual enlightening which revealed to him the real nature of the divine kingdom. Indeed, he pointedly insists that he had been set apart for this work, even in his mother's womb; and the expression is significant, when it is compared with the passionate self-accusations which, if the text be genuine, he makes in his letter to the Galatians.¹

If, then, we look to these sentences for evidence to establish the fact of the bodily or sensible resurrection of Jesus, we shall search in vain. No such evidence is here given. We have at most the expression of a belief said to be entertained by some few persons that, after the bodily death of Jesus, they had seen him alive; and this expression comes, not from the witnesses, but from one who does

¹ It is hard to suppress a feeling of suspicion, when we regard the connexion of Gal. i. 13, 14 with the context. The connexion of the twelfth with the fifteenth verse is as close as it can possibly be. These two sentences break it up completely. It is singular too that Paul, speaking of matters which do not seem much to trouble him elsewhere, should in two sentences make use of three words which he never employs in any other part of his letters, and which are not found in any other book of the New Testament writings. Of these words, two are *συνηλικιώτης* and *πατρικός*—the third being the more remarkable term *Ἰουδαῖσμός*. The whole phrase, *προκόπτειν ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ*, is strange, and seems to point to distinctions of a considerably later time. Between this passage and the speech put into Paul's mouth in Acts xxii. 3-5, there are some strong points of likeness. In the latter, Paul is made to speak of himself as *ζηλωτὴς ὑπάρχων τοῦ Θεοῦ*; in the former, as *ζηλωτὴς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων*. The whole passage is in harmony with the language of the Acts; and the intrusion of these sentences into the apostle's text by one of the writers of Acts is not an impossibility.

not even say that he had known or questioned them or had even seen them. But the subject cannot be summarily put aside, as though these sentences must come necessarily from the writer of the letter in which the words are found. It may be said with but with little exaggeration (perhaps with none) that the texts of the New Testament writings are honeycombed with interpolations of every kind. Marginal glosses have found their way into the body of works which they were intended to illustrate or to interpret; and in this way the authority of the highest names has been obtained for utterances which they never set down on parchment or on paper. When, further, we consider that these insertions have, in almost every instance, been made in the interests of the growing Christian dogma, which tended more and more to rest the faith of Christ on the basis of alleged historical facts or events or incidents, we shall see at once that to obtain the sanction of the name of the apostle Paul would be a matter of supreme importance. Of these insertions made in the text even of those letters which we may regard as in substance genuine, some betray themselves almost at the first glance, the interruption and dislocation of the argument being among the surest of signs that the interpolator has been at work; and, if we look to the age of our manuscripts, we must admit that he had a long lease of power. Our earliest manuscripts carry us back only to the fourth century, and very much less than one-half of three hundred years would suffice for the leisurely accomplishment of this task.¹ Nor can it

¹ 'It is well known,' says the author of *Supernatural Religion*, 'that numerous interpolations have been introduced into the text. The whole history of the Canon and of Christian literature in the second and third centuries displays the most deplorable carelessness and want of critical judgement on the part of the Fathers. Whatever was considered as conducive to Christian edification was blindly adopted by them; and a vast number of works were launched into circulation, and falsely ascribed to Apostles and others likely to secure for them greater consideration. Such pious fraud was rarely suspected, still more rarely detected, and several of such pseudographs have secured a place in our New Testament. . . . It is clear, from the words attributed to the Apostle Paul in 2 Thess. ii. 2; iii. 17, that his epistles were falsified; and setting aside some of those which bear his name in our Canon, spurious epistles were long ascribed to him, such as the Epistle to the Laodiceans, and a third Epistle to the Corinthians,' ii. 166.

be denied that many of these insertions have been made with no little skill; and, in many cases, the matter inserted may be even more valuable than that of the treatise on which it may be regarded as a comment. The third and fourth verses of the fourth chapter in the letter to the Ephesians are certainly a good specimen of much matter compressed into small space, and it has the effect of securing the authority of the apostle's name for the assertion of the preaching of Jesus to the spirits in prison in the interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection. But it betrays its true nature by the awkwardness with which it cuts the argument which says (verse 8) that on his ascending the Christ led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, and goes on (verse 11) to say, 'and he gave some to be apostles, some prophets,' etc.

The grounds on which the genuineness of the concluding chapters of the letter to the Romans has been questioned are very strong, and something like a general assent has been reached for the proposition that almost the whole of these chapters are from other hands than those of Paul.¹ If we find the opening sentences at the beginning of an epistle couched in a strain of extravagant eulogy, we may reasonably suppose that we are reading a formula of greetings of which there could never fail to be an abundant supply. Thus the passage in the letter to the Romans (i. 8-12) is, in this sense, suspicious, while the last clause in the sixteenth verse of the same chapter is manifestly spurious.² A more glaring instance is furnished by the exultant thanksgiving with which the first letter to the Corinthians begins (1 Cor. i. 4-9) as compared with the charges brought against them later on. But the most potent of all motives was to obtain the apostle's sanction and win his authority for what is commonly called the historical framework of Christianity. This, in the second and third centuries, was a matter of paramount need, and it was achieved by inserting in 1 Cor. xv. the passage occupying verses 3-8, and the

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, iii. 330.

² *Ibid.* iii. 289, *et seq.*

passage on the institution of the Eucharist contained in verses 23-25 in the eleventh chapter of the same letter. Nine verses in all suffice for the accomplishment of this great task. In both passages there is the same marked breaking-in upon the coherence of the context, the same interruption in the argument; and in both there is the Paradosis.¹ But in the eleventh chapter the Paradosis is said to come 'from the Lord;' and this knowledge is handed on by the writer to the Corinthians. If, then, it comes from Paul, it follows that he looked to the divine Spirit to give him historical instruction, and that he received it. There is not a single genuine passage in his letters which gives the least countenance to such a notion. But the expression in 1 Cor. xv. 3 leaves, and is clearly meant to leave, the impression that Paul received the tradition of the Christophanies from the apostolic college, and by doing so, recognised their authority, which, in his letter to the Galatians, he pointedly and flatly rejects. This conclusion is, in truth, in complete contradiction to every statement in his letter to the Galatians. The apostle there denies that there has been for him any Paradosis from any mortal man; and for the enumeration of Christophanies he seems to have neither thought nor care.

We have seen that even if it came from Paul, this 'very circumstantial account of the testimony on which the belief in the resurrection rested' would have no value. But it does not come from him, and we cannot look to his letters for the

¹ The words in which the Paradosis is spoken of are in both cases the same; and the account of the institution in 1 Cor. xi. 23-25 is not in the least wanted for the argument, and, indeed, interferes with, and breaks it up. If we take away these three verses, the context becomes both coherent and luminous. What the apostle is then seen to say is this: 'If you wish merely to have a social meal, cannot you have this in your own houses? As it is, we have only disorder. Shall I praise you while you so behave? I cannot do so. What you profess in eating the Lord's Supper, is that you are setting forth or proclaiming the Master's death till he come. He then who eats it in an unseemly or disorderly fashion, will be guilty in reference to the body and blood of the Lord,' etc.

That the verses 23-25 are an insertion, seems to me a matter of no doubt; but the insertion may extend even further. The connexion is much closer if, from the end of the twenty-second, we go to the end of the twenty-ninth verse.

upholding of what is called the historical framework of Christianity.¹

¹ If we wish to have a coherent text for the last six chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians, we must connect xi. 22 with xi. 33, and, having read on to the end of xii. 31, go on to the first verse of chapter xiv., and then, having reached xiv. 40, pass on to the first verse of the sixteenth chapter. This involves the omission of the episodical chapter on Agapè, or Love, and also the discourse on the Anastasis. The latter it seems to me quite impossible to read without the very strongest suspicion that we have here the handiwork of two or three different writers, belonging to widely different schools of thought, not one of them having much in common with the spiritual education through which Paul had passed. The chapter on Agapè is wholly unlike anything else in what we may reasonably regard as the genuine writings of the great apostle. But it is this dislocation which more than anything betrays the fact of intrusion. Can any thing be weaker than the opening of the fourteenth chapter as it now stands? After having so spoken as he has, in the thirteenth chapter, of the eternal love, it seems a bathos indeed to bid his disciples to follow after it, and to come down to petty details of organization and administration, after having risen into the heaven of heavens on the wings of the all-embracing and never-failing Agapè. Taking this chapter away, we have what may perhaps be a less highly exalted, but is in reality a more appropriate lesson, for his Corinthian converts. Having warned them against jealousies and divisions, he bids them covet the better gifts, but says that he can show them a better way than even the very highest of these gifts (xii. 31). This better way is that of Love, and this way they must follow (xiv. 1), and their first care should be to obtain the strictly spiritual gifts, and especially that of prophecy. Then follows the comparison and contrast of prophecy and the gift of speaking with a tongue. Prophecy, then, is that which they should strive for, while the speaking with tongues should still be tolerated. 'Let everything be done decently and in order' (xiv. 40). As to the collection for the saints (xvi. 1) they were to follow the directions which he had given to them. With a few more practical injunctions the letter comes to an end.

The statement in verse 8 of this chapter of his purpose to remain quietly in Ephesus till Pentecost is in direct contradiction with verse 32 of chapter xv. He could not have so continued to live there, if he had been condemned to appear in the arena, and if the sentence had been carried out.

On the mere score of disagreement with the context, Galat. i. 13, 14, looks a suspicious passage. This excessive self-accusation seems quite inconsistent with what follows in verses 15-16. We must remember that the narrative of Paul's actions in the Acts is not to be trusted, and that the Stephen story is a fiction. See Book I. chapter I. Even in Acts (xxiii. 1) we have an assertion which seems to point in quite another direction.

APPENDIX A

THE GROWTH OF MIRACLES, OR OF NARRATIVES OF THAUMATURGY

(See pp. 152, 167, 213, 246, 260, 349.)

WE have seen that charges given for the doing of spiritual works will, amongst ignorant and credulous folk, pass readily into narratives which speak only of material wonders. The idea of the former to the Eastern mind immediately suggests and grows into the latter ; and so far as we can trace this process going on in the narratives of the New Testament writings, so far do the records cease at once to be historical. It may be well to see to what extent this tendency accounts for the special forms assumed by the stories of miracles and wonders in the Gospels. The process went on in every direction, and to a large extent it was not perceived ; but in spite of this it is scarcely illegitimate to speak of the work going on as a systematic manufacturing of miracles. We have seen already what was the condition of the so-called apostolic age in reference to sobriety and trustworthiness of judgement. Of their credulity we have abundant evidence. The mere existence of the Gospel narratives is full proof at least of this ; and it is needless to say that the Gospel records can establish nothing unless they are borne out by adequate contemporary testimony. The stories, indeed, tell us over and over again that the people were astonished at the wonders which they saw. But this is merely a statement made by writers who belonged to a later generation or a later century. We have no proper evidence that any one of the persons mentioned in these records ever saw any of the prodigies which are said to have been witnessed every day and almost every hour.

But we can readily understand how stories of wonders should spring out of metaphors used by a great teacher ; and we need not speak only of his words. In a thoroughly superstitious and credulous age his works of mercy and love would be translated into outward or bodily or tangible miracles. The essence of his work must necessarily be the

freeing men from sin. But sin is ignorance (*blindness*). Sin is infirmity (*lameness, halting*). Sin is defilement (*leprosy*). Sin is dulness and deafness (*deaf, dumb*). Sin is death (not the death of the body, but the death which is the lack of spiritual life). The charge which on this hypothesis the great Teacher would give to those whom he sent forth would be to deliver men from this blindness, lameness, leprosy, deafness, dumbness, and death. Just in so far as his life and his work made a right impression on their minds, he would be giving them power to cure all these diseases and to raise men from this spiritual death. So far as they shared his goodness and his zeal, nothing could hurt them and nothing should be able to withstand them. They might go amongst the worst of men; and they would not be injured by the poison of their evil language, by the tempers which make them worse than beasts, by the rage and fury which consume them. They would be able to tread down the scorpions of malice, the snakes of slander, the tigers of cruelty and lust. All this they would do by the power of the divine love in which they dwelt. The worst of tempers would give way before their merciful influence, and they who had been dead to all that is good would be awakened to the life of truth and righteousness. They would, in short, be fellow-workers with God; and this work would be a process,—the process which prepares the way for the incoming of the kingdom of God. But this process is certainly not one which could be described as the result of a short excursion into Judæa or Galilee during a short portion of the single year which, in the Synoptic Gospels, seems to constitute the whole period of the ministry of Jesus. This, in truth, is all that seems to be assigned to the mission of the Seventy in Luke x. 9, 17. The alleged historical character of the mission is examined elsewhere.

The work to be done, then, would be wholly spiritual. But a grossly superstitious age, under the general conditions of Eastern thought, could not fail to translate the terms used in describing it into the language of material marvels; and the spiritual teacher would in a little while become the mere Thaumaturgos, or wonder-worker. That they would be sent to work these material wonders is impossible. Such work would be wholly removed from the limits of the task which is to end in the conquest of all spiritual evil. Men would soon cease to trouble themselves about these prodigies, and, in fact, so the Gospel narratives represent them as doing. Most of the stories of outward and material marvels have been examined in the preceding pages, with the result that each has been proved to be destitute of historical value. But the inquiry will appear to be almost superfluous, if we hold that all such stories are translations of spiritual work into a material

dress. At the utmost there remain by comparison only a few which cannot be so explained; and these few agree in ascribing to the great Healer and Deliverer power over the forces of the outward world.

In like manner, it is beyond all question that the Master, when he refers to his own acts, refers strictly and only to his spiritual works. Were these works to be jumbled up with material wonders, the confusion would be overwhelming. It follows, therefore, that when he answers the two disciples of John the Baptist, he is referring them to the spiritual works by which he is everywhere quickening the spiritual life. Clearly in Matthew xi. 2-5 these works alone are spoken of; and they fall into six classes:—

- I. The blind are gaining sight.
- II. The halt and lame are walking about.
- III. The lepers are being cleansed.
- IV. The deaf are hearing.
- V. The dead are being raised.
- VI. The poor are being evangelised.

There are here six spiritual conditions—the last one meaning the spiritually poor,—poor as being starved, or stunted, or distorted in their minds,—poor as having a scant sense of what is good, true, pure, lovely. Under one or other of these classes the vast majority of all the stories of wonder or miracle in the Gospels may be arranged. That these six classes are in the first Synoptic (xii. 2-5) purely spiritual, no one probably will deny or doubt. The answer is given at once, *i.e.* the disciples of John are referred to the moral and spiritual work which has been, and is being, done. It is not a work which could be examined or judged of in a few minutes, as it might be if it consisted merely of material wonder-working.

In Luke vii. 21, the answer, as the text has come down to us, is not immediate. A sentence is inserted which makes the spiritual work material. It has all the appearance of an interpolation; and in great likelihood it is such. If it be, then the original compiler of the Gospel cannot be charged with this low conception of the Master's work. But for the writer of this interpolated verse, it is clear that the works to which Jesus appealed were outward and material,—were what are called miracles or wonders; and thus, if we confine ourselves to the mind of this writer, we see the outward miracle in the process of birth and growth.

The following list contains all the wonders in the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels, which fall under the six heads already mentioned.

I. The *blind* are gaining sight.

Matt. ix. 27-30. The healing of the blind men.

„ xii. 22. Blind and dumb man, possessed.

„ xx. 30-34. Two blind men, as in ix. 27-30.

Mark viii. 22-25. The blind man at Bethsaida.

„ x. 46-52. The blind Bartimaeos at Jericho.

Luke xviii. 35. The story of Bartimaeos (Mark x. 46) without his name.

John ix. 7. The cure of the blind man at Siloam.

II. The *lame* or *halt* are walking.

John v. 5-9. The halt or impotent man at Bethesda.

III. The *lepers* are being cleansed.

Matt. viii. 2, 3. The leper at the foot of the mountain.

Mark i. 40-42. Perhaps the same story as in Matt. viii. 2, 3.

Luke v. 12, 13. The same probably as in Matt. viii. 23, and Mark i. 40, 42.

„ xvii. 12-19. The cleansing of the ten lepers.

IV. The *deaf* are hearing.

Mark vii. 32-35. The deaf man with impediment in his speech.

„ ix. 20-27. The child with the deaf and dumb spirit.
The two are connected. With deafness goes dumbness (the spirit of obstinacy, perversity, obduracy).

Matt. ix. 32, 33. The dumb possession.

„ xii. 22. Blind and dumb possession.

Mark ix. 17-27. The child with the dumb and deaf spirit.

Luke xi. 14. Dumb possession.

V. The *dead* are being raised.

Matt. ix. 18. The ruler's daughter (if this be not swoon).

„ xxvii. 52. The resurrection of the saints. But this seems given up on all sides as mere *φαντασία*.

Mark v. 39. The same story as in Matt. ix. 18.

Luke vii. 11-15. The son of the widow of Nain.

„ viii. 41, 42, and 49-55. The daughter of Jairos, the same as in Matt. ix. 18, where it seems to be swoon.

John xi. The raising of Lazarus. This story is built up on the thought of the spiritual uprising (for sin) and of the life which follows it,—*ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή*, 25, 'He that believeth on me' (he who has any faith or trust in the divine goodness) 'shall live, even though he should have died' (spiritually); 'and he who lives and believes on me' (whose life is in the divine life)

'shall never die' (the death of sin). Translated into merely material phrases, the words have no meaning, or become the statement of that which is manifestly not fact. So in John v. 25-28, the reference is to things spiritual. In any other sense the words have no meaning. 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead (in sin) shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live—live though they must be judged,' πάντες ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις being the only word of material metaphor, the graves of sin or of darkness. There is some confusion here in the language of the evangelist, the κρίσις applying to all, and not being confined only to οἱ τὰ φεῦλα πράξαντες.

- VI. The *poor* are receiving the good news (of the divine love). The poor are poor in spirit,—in the poverty of spiritual life. But the words speak for themselves too clearly to allow of their being translated into the language of outward and sensible miracle or prodigy.

As it is quite impossible to believe that the great Teacher of Nazareth was a mere worker of outward wonders, so it is not less impossible to suppose that he could commission any body of men to go forth in order that they might work only or chiefly outward signs or wonders among the people. But we are told that he did give commissions to bodies of men, to the twelve and to the seventy, and the terms of the commission are much the same for both. The charge then was either that they should do spiritual works and achieve spiritual wonders, or that they should do physical works and exhibit sensible marvels. The commission has not a word which says or implies that they were to do works of more than one kind. Either then they were to do what are vulgarly called miracles, or they were to be workers of great spiritual changes; and as it is impossible to suppose that they were intended to be mere workers of sensible marvels, it follows indisputably that they were sent forth as spiritual workers only.

The commissions given to the Twelve are said to be as follows:—

Matt. x. 8. 'Heal the sick; cleanse the lepers; raise the dead; cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give.'

Mark iii. 14, 15. 'Sent them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sickness and to cast out devils.'

„ vi. 7. 'Gave them power over unclean spirits.'

Mark xvi. 17, 18. 'These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' So far as the translating of spiritual commands into biddings to accomplish outward wonders is concerned, it matters nothing whether this passage be spurious or not.

Luke ix. 12. 'Gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases; and he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.'

To the Seventy :—

Luke x. 9, 19. 'Heal the sick. . . . I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.'

The language used by the Seventy on their return is scarcely in harmony with that which is commonly used elsewhere on the same subject. 'Master, even the demons are subject to us in thy name' (Luke x. 17). According to Jewish belief the most obstinate of demons might be exorcised, without causing any great feeling of astonishment. Here the Seventy are represented as full of wonder, because the worst of men, very brutes or savages, were tamed in and by the spirit (name) of the great Teacher. The answer is, 'I was seeing Satan like lightning fall from heaven,'—that is, his eye could range onward to the great consummation when all evil shall have been conquered and extinguished.

Hence comes the whole class of *thaumata*, or wonders connected with the casting out of devils (evil tempers, perversity, obstinacy, obduracy), recorded in the following :—

Matthew iv. 24, Curings of all manner of diseases.

(It follows that when Jesus 'heals all manner of diseases and sickness among the people,' the spiritual work would in each case become a material wonder.)

Matt. viii. 16. The expulsion of devils, and cures, in the evening.

„ 28-34. The two possessed men in the Gergesene country; the devils being sent into the swine.

„ xiv. 35. Cures in the land of Gennesareth.

„ xv. 22. The daughter of a woman of Canaan.

Matt. xv. 30. The healing of a multitude of possessed and sick.

„ xix. 2. Cures of multitudes beyond Judæa.

Mark i. 23-26. The man with the unclean spirit.

„ iii. 10-11. Cures of many sick and possessed.

„ v. 2. 11. The possessed in the country of the Gadarenes
—in Matt. viii. 28-34 the possessed belongs to the
Gergesene country.

„ vi. 56. Cures of touch, or by touching garments.

Luke vi. 17. Healing of the multitudes possessed and sick.

„ viii. 2. Woman cured of infirmities and possession.

„ xiii. 11-15. The woman with the spirit of infirmity.

From the general statement it is easy, as we may see from some of the foregoing, to get into details of specific maladies. Thus we have those who are *Sick of palsy*.

Matt. viii. 6. The palsied servant of the centurion.

„ ix. 2-7. The bedridden man with palsy.

Mark ii. 3. The same story as in Matt. viii. 6.

Luke v. 18. The same story, substantially, as in Mark ii. 3.

Sick of fever.

Matt. viii. 15. Peter's wife's mother.

Mark i. 30. „ „ „

Luke iv. 39. „ „ „

John iv. 5. The son of the ruler in Cana.

Lunatic.

Matt. xvii. 13.

Unclean spirit.

Mark i. 23.

„ vii. 26. The Syrophenician woman.

Luke iv. 13. The man in the synagogue.

Epilepsy.

Luke ix. 38.

Dropsy.

Luke xiv. 2.

Issue of blood.

Matt. ix. 20.

Mark v. 25.

Luke viii. 43.

Withered hand.

Matt. xii. 10.

Mark iii. 1.

Luke vi. 10.

There remain a few instances of wonders (for the most part already examined) which exhibit features peculiar to themselves, *e.g.* the destruction of the demon-possessed swine, and the healing of the ear of Malchus, Luke xxii. 51. These, with the following, point to power over the external world :—

Matt. viii. 24-26. The stilling of the stormy sea.

Luke viii. 24. " " "

Matt. xiv. 17-20. The multiplying of loaves and fishes.

" xv. 32, 38. The same story, with the numbers altered.

Mark vi. 38. The same story as in Matt. xiv. and xv.

Luke ix. 13. " " "

John vi. 5-14. " " "

Matt. xiv. 32. The walking on, and stilling of, the sea.

Mark vi. 48-51. " " "

John vi. 19. The same story, without the incident of Peter.

Matt. xvii. 27. The fish with the tribute coin.

" xxi. 19. The withering of the fig-tree.

Mark xi. 13-20. " " "

Luke v. 4-7. The draught of fishes : the number indefinite.

John xxi. 11. " " " definite.

Matt. xvii. 2. The transfiguration.

Mark ix. 2. " "

Luke ix. 29. " "

These marvels are seemingly instances, not of the petrification of phrases denoting spiritual truths or facts into material wonders or prodigies, but of ideas belonging to the great mythical storehouse from which the popular beliefs of traditional Christianity have been in great part derived. The others seem, without exception, to point to their origin as translations of spiritual into material language; and this remark applies strictly to the narratives of what are called the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension.¹ The book *Lux Mundi* seems written on purpose to insist that the historical reanimation is the very basis of Christianity.² If the historical reanimation falls, 'all the rest will drift away'; and by way of clinching this conclusion, we are referred to 1 Cor. xv. But in that chapter the Anastasis of Jesus the Christ is made to depend on the present rising of the dead. 'If the dead are not now rising, then Christ has not been raised' (v. 16). But the dead are *not* being raised in this sense, or in any except a spiritual sense; and what the writer of this chapter is saying is that

¹ See Colenso, *Natal Sermons*, ii. 301; *Life*, ii. 113-115.

² P. 236 ff., 10th ed.

if the dead in sin are not being raised to the life of righteousness, then it is useless to talk about belief in the rising of the eternal Son from the death to sin, the death and the uprising being alike eternal. This is the Nicene faith ; but, apparently, it does not satisfy the writers of that volume, which may be said, without much injustice, to beg every question with which it deals.

APPENDIX B

THE SO-CALLED HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY

(See pp. 200, 213, 293, 303, 337, 353, 416, 434, 435, 444, 454, 473.)

THE most deeply-rooted conviction of the Greek mind was that of the absolute independence of each Hellenic city from all other Hellenic cities. With barbarians the Hellenic tribes had nothing to do ; with each other they had certain bonds of union and certain grounds of sympathy. They spoke a common language, in dialects understood by all. They had some moral instincts which distinguished them from all other races. They could meet as Amphiktionones to deal with matters affecting their common interests. In some of the great games all might take part who were entitled to bear the Hellenic name. Every Hellene might, if he so chose, be initiated in the great Athenian mysteries at Eleusis. There was, further, the influence of art, which gave to their festivals their marvellous magnificence and beauty.

But apart from these grounds of union which may not undeservedly be called national, their political instincts were all centrifugal. The jealousy of each Hellenic city extended to every thing which might help to distinguish it from all others ; but it guarded with special care all that affected the local religion—in other words, all that was linked with the name and the exploits of the Eponymos, or founder. Argos, Athens, Thebes, Megara, Delos, had each its own local epos, which belonged to itself alone. Argos had the story of the great deeds of Perseus ; Athens took pride in the glory of Theseus ; Thebes told of the victories of Oidipous in the discomfiture of the Sphinx. But the fact on which it is impossible to lay too much stress is this,—that all these stories and a thousand others were, to the several tribes or cities, genuine records of actual events, the independent chronicles of kings or heroes whose fortunes ran each in its own peculiar channel, and that this conviction was from first to last a delusion. Instead of being

each a separate mirror, these traditions strictly resemble a prism in which a thousand pictures flash from a few planes, while all are reflected from a single piece of glass, and all reflect one object only,—the orb of the light-giving sun. Of the inhabitants of all these cities, of the great poets who wrought out their mighty works from the materials of these traditions, not one saw that they were all constructed on the same lines, and that all told substantially the same story. The events recorded took place, it was admitted, long ago, just as every incident in every popular tale happened once upon a time, and only once; but no one was there to say that Herakles, Perseus, Kadmos, Oidipous, were all of them variations of one and the same deliverer and conqueror, and that Danaë and Alkëstis, Eurôpê, and Aithra, are one and the same dawn-maiden. So it has been with the traditions of the Teutonic lands. No one in days much before our own had stood up to say that Brynhild and Aslauga, Ashputtel and Cinderella and Briarrose are essentially one being, their names only, and some of their outward garb, being changed. But this identity is universally acknowledged now, and the stories told about them are looked upon by some as fictions of poets and dreams of old crones, though for the comparative philologist they have a perpetual value. They are, in fact, reflexions of the phenomena of the outward world in the course of the day, the month, or the year. The local colouring will vary; the incidents will come in different order, and their character may undergo as many changes as the sun himself undergoes in his daily journey across our heaven. The men of old time who marked these changes gave the sun a name according to each of these modifications, and every one of these names either did or might furnish the foundation of a story which might grow up into an epic poem. Many of these names and stories are quite transparent. When we are told that, after slaying the black sorcerer Naraka, who had stolen them away, Krishna weds sixteen thousand one hundred maidens all at the same moment, each in her separate mansion, no one doubts that he has here a tale of the love of the sun for the dew, as in that of Prokris we have the solitary drop slain in the deep thicket by the unerring spear of him who loves her. The significance of these tales escaped notice for many reasons, the chief being that scrutiny and comparison were things unknown, and, under existing conditions, unattainable. The Greek or the Roman knew no language but his own. He might see that incidents in the Argive legend are repeated in that of Athens or of Thebes; but as he could not compare his own traditions with the hymns of the Rig Veda, he could not tell that the Zeus and the Ouranos to which he daily looked up were the Dyauś and

Varuna of the Hindu, and that in Ushas, the ever-young dawn, who makes men old, we have the earliest conception which has embodied itself in the forms of Antigônê and Helen, Athene, Artemis, or Aphroditê. If in each story there were features more or less alike, his very familiarity with the ideas brought before him prevented him from making any attempts to trace them back to their origin. The heroes were almost all maiden or virgin-born, in the sense that they had no human father; and the Greek accepted the statement at once as one which he had no reason for calling into question. Perseus was the son of Danaë; but the babe was the child of the golden shower, and the purity of the brides of Zeus or Phoibos was in no way tarnished by their becoming mothers of children of the eternal gods. Alkêstis, again, was taken away by Thanatos, or death, and was brought back from the dark land by Herakles. There was nothing more in this than the poet or the story-teller found in the legends of Eurydikê or Asklepios, Memnon, or Adonis, or Sarpedon. Far from being strange, the ideas of maiden mothers and of slain and risen gods were almost more familiar to the mind of the Greek than many of the possible, or even ordinary, experiences of life are to us.

But, having traced the growth of popular tradition thus far, we are suddenly told that although these stories, which are described and dismissed as heathen or pagan, are mere fiction, and although the incidents recorded in them never took place and never could take place, there is nevertheless another story, the latest of all such stories, as to which we must come to a wholly different conclusion, inasmuch as the veracity of it rests on the statements of books, the authority of which is not to be questioned. This, too, is a story which tells of a babe who has no human father; who is born in a stable or cave; at whose birth angels are heard singing in the sky; whom the tyrant seeks to kill; who grows up an embodiment of marvellous wisdom; who gives himself to the work of doing good; who is tempted by the spirit of evil to self-indulgence or ambition; who, like the solar wanderers in a thousand myths, has no place where to lay his head;¹ who shows his power on the surface of the sea, and makes a ship instantaneously reach the haven for which it was making; who heals the sick, and raises the dead, like Asklepios; who assumes many forms; who promises to draw all men to him if he be lifted up from the earth;

¹ Matt. viii. 20; Luke ix. 58. This is mere mythos. The very request thus answered implied that the Teacher was a wanderer. How long he had been such, and why he should become such, are other questions. Till his thirtieth year we are told that he followed the settled occupation of a carpenter in Nazareth, and his kinsfolk had their settled abodes.

who is brought before an unjust judge like Dionysos before Pentheus ; who is crucified ; who goes down among the dead ; who rises again from his rock-hewn grave, and vanishes by a visible ascent into heaven.

A patient and minute examination of the narratives of all the four Gospels has forced us to the conclusion that, whatever else they may be, histories, in the proper sense of the word, they are not in any part of them. But were we at the beginning of our inquiry instead of at the end of it, we might well ask on what grounds of logic we are to reject a thousand such stories as worthless, and then to insist that the thousand and first is absolutely true, not as a symbolical picture of spiritual verities, but as an exact recital of events which have occurred in particular times or places. What is there on the face of the Gospel stories which proves their exactness, while it condemns all the others ? What right have we to say that one incident is a fact because it is found in our Gospels, while the very same incident, when found in any other sacred books, is indubitably a fiction ? No one probably expects nowadays to get a hearing for the absurdities which assumed that the older stories were mere diabolical illusions framed to cheat, if possible, even the true believers, and that all later ones are parodies of passages in the Christian Scriptures. It is easy to assume and to assert ; but neither process is scientific.

But, strange to say, there survives even yet a temper of mind which completely inverts the order of the discussion, and which insists on the truth of the Christian tradition (which they style the Christian revelation), on the ground that the fundamental ideas involved in it are such as the unaided human mind could never have formulated. These fundamental ideas are said to be especially those of the incarnation (taken as an historical incident) and of the resurrection (in the sense of the reanimation of a dead body). Men singularly truth-loving in themselves, men of more than ordinary powers, men of no careless training, may be heard to affirm, not, perhaps, without a look of nervous uncertainty, that birth from a virgin, and the reanimation of what we call a dead body, must be true in reference to the narratives of the Christian Gospels, because no one had ever seen or heard or thought of such things before.

Of the two pleas we cannot urge both at once, for the former declares that these ideas were as familiar to Athenians of the age of Perikles as they can well be to us ; and as to thefts from the Christian Sacred Books, we must have somewhat more of proof and something less of mere assertion. That in Io, the mother of the god incarnate in the form of Epaphos, we have a virgin or maiden-birth, there is no question. The language of Æschylus asserts her purity with marked

reverence, and declares that the breath or spirit of Zeus made her a mother.¹

According to our third Synoptic Gospel Jesus is born in a stable. The statement of Justin that he must be born in a cave shows clearly that the Gospel which he had before him mentioned this fact. It has been the common practice with Christian painters (whether purposely or unconsciously) to reconcile the two traditions by representing the stable as a cave used for the cover of cattle. It is scarcely necessary to say that the number of cave-born gods is not small. Zeus himself springs to light in the cave of Diktê, or, as others call it, Lyktos. So, too, Hermes is cave-born; so is Mithras; so is Krishna; and into the cave of Latmos (or forgetfulness) the sun-god sinks on the ending of his journey in the evening, as the body of Jesus is laid to rest in the rock-hewn tomb of the Arimathean Joseph.

How far the stories of the angelic song and of the slaughter of the innocents are independent or borrowed narratives in the Vishnu Purana, it is unnecessary to discuss. The Purana tales and the Gospel narratives may have a common source, without being borrowed by either one from the other. Still we may note the fact that the Purana story speaks of the angelic chorus, and of the murder wrought on the children of two years old and under, in order to insure the destruction of the babe who is lord of all worlds.²

But although a scrutiny of details may yield results of great significance, we shall probably miss the force of many of them unless we look at the Gospel narratives as each a whole. In the case of the Synoptic Gospels we can do so without difficulty. That there is a certain agreement between these records in geography and chronology


¹ See Book II. ch. ii. p. 180. Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Tryphon, says: 'When I hear that Perseus was born of a virgin, I understand that the deceiving serpent counterfeited also this.' But this is distinctly an admission that the idea of maiden-birth had been rendered familiar to the human mind by diabolical agency for centuries before his own time. It has been well said, to take one example, that 'if the Mithraists had simply imitated the historic Christians, the obvious course for the latter would be simply to say so. In that case there would be no need to talk of demons; it would be far more effective to charge human plagiarism.'—*Mithraism*, by J. M. Robertson, in *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 208.

² The power of the myth in enforcing its own chronology was great; but the incidents belonging to each date might be regarded in more ways than one. The Syrian devotees associated the winter solstice with the death of the sun and with his rising again to new power. In the Christian year the event commemorated is the birth of the new sun without reference to any preceding suns. The crucifixion is the lifting up upon a height in the sight of all men, and therefore follows the spring equinox. The rising on the third day is, in this connexion, misplaced. It belongs to the uprising of the sun after his death at the end of the year, while the rising on the following morning is common to all the days of the year.

is admitted universally. Those who adopt or put faith in the chronology of the fourth Gospel still allow that in the other three there is only one passover, and that Jesus celebrates it with his disciples before his passion. There is thus a period of only eleven or twelve months for the whole of the ministry. In the third Gospel Jesus is said to be about thirty years of age before he begins his mission; but, except for the solitary incident in his thirteenth year related in our third Gospel, the previous time is an absolute blank, and no more than fifty-two weeks are left for the achievement of the great task of preaching the good news of God. When we consider the journeys to be undertaken, the time needed to make an impression on the average Galilæan or Samaritan or Judaic mind, the charges given first to the twelve, then to the seventy, and the amount of work undertaken and finished by the latter, the limit of time assigned is wholly incredible. Missions to benighted, ignorant, superstitious, and godless folk cannot be established and produce good fruit in the compass of a few weeks. If this period of one year be not historical, it must be mythical,¹—that is, it must be the framework of a life which represents the course of a solar year; and into this framework all the phases of that life must be made to fit. Thus looked at, all chronological difficulties cease; and details which had seemed strange and perplexing become clear enough. Thus Apollôn, as the sun-god, has power on the water as well as on the dry land. In the so-called Homeric Hymn, the vessel in which he sits is propelled at wonderful speed without oar or sail. As the dolphin, he can move on or in the water;² and Jesus has the same power, for the Johannine Gospel (vi. 21) asserts plainly that, as soon as he had entered the vessel, the ship was immediately at the land whither they went. In this tale the disciples do not recognise Jesus as he walks on the sea, so completely has he the power of assuming many forms. Meek and lowly while doing his good work, he can, as in his Transfiguration, invest himself with the splendour of his eternal majesty; and so again, after his resurrection, he is not recognised by Mary Magdalene or by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

¹ Not a few sayings in the Gospel narratives, which are otherwise strangely obscure and perplexing, become transparently clear when they are seen to be the Logia of the myth. It has long since been noted that on the great heroes of Aryan mythology generally there is laid the doom of perpetual pilgrimage; and so the Son of Man 'has not where he may lay his head.' The sun is never stationary. Other phrases of a like kind are: 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me'; 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up'; 'He healed others; himself he cannot heal.' The giver of life, strength, and health, must sink into darkness as he approaches the horizon, but after this there must be the anastasis. The sayings and writings must be fulfilled.

² Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, Book II. ch. ii. sec. 10.

That some details, which do not occur in the Synoptics, should be found in the Johannine Gospels,¹ is in no way surprising. The Gospel is throughout Hellenic; and if there be any truth in the tradition that it was put together at Ephesus, it was composed among a people steeped in Greek myth. It is from this Gospel that we get the significant declaration, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' The evangelist adds that the saying pointed to the manner of his death. If it be so, and if that death was by penal crucifixion, the words can scarcely be said to have any fulfilment. In this servile punishment the feet of the sufferer were scarcely more than a few inches above the ground, and he was no more lifted up from the earth than is any one who sits on a scaffold or in a carriage. It served the evangelist's purpose so to divert the words; but the saying points to one of the most familiar myths of the Greek world. The Lamb takes away the sins of the world by lifting them up. The action is that of the sun, which lifts up the noxious vapours from the soil, and then disperses them; and in this sense the saying fits the myth exactly. The myth itself is transparent. Ixion (the sun as a wheel whirling on its axis through the sky) becomes, as he rises in the sky, the lover of Hêrê the queen of heaven herself, and is in requital fastened to the four-spoked cross ² The myth is correlative to that of Sisypheos. The zenith is the summit of the arch beyond which he is not suffered to rise. It follows that the highest point of exaltation marks the beginning of the descent which must end in gloom and darkness as of death. Irresistible during the time of his ascent until noon, he begins to sink from that moment to his inevitable doom. There are no possible or conceivable means by which that issue can be avoided. It can neither be averted nor delayed nor modified in any way; and we are thus brought to the Greek doctrine (so uncongenial to the Hellenic mind) of invincible and irresistible necessity.³ Hence, also, necessarily, the saying thus ascribed to Jesus is placed in close connexion with his death; and this connexion is brought out still more clearly in the Synoptic Gospels. Here, when something like half of the period assigned to the ministry has passed away, he suddenly, without any warning to lead up to it, tells his disciples that he must

¹ On the other hand, the Johannine Gospel knows nothing of Jesus as being the Carpenter's Son, Matt. xiii. 51, or as being himself the Carpenter, Mark vi. 3. Yet the phrases belong to the old mythical language. Odysseus is especially the *τέκτων*, whose craft reflects the work of the great architect of the universe.

² *τετραπύκνων δέσμων*. Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, p. 283.

³ Cox, *ib.*, Book II. ch. ii. section 9. There can be little doubt, or none, that the ideas of the sun sinking from the meridian, and of the suffering Messiah, are the same. The former passed naturally into the latter.

go up to Jerusalem, and there, after suffering many things, be killed, and on the third day rise again. In the narrative of the first Gospel¹ this declaration is met by Peter's expressing a hope that nothing of the sort may happen. In that of Luke,² his words leave them in a state of blank astonishment, the fact being especially stated that they could attach no meaning to the resurrection from the dead.

How this could be when they had themselves witnessed the recalling to life of the widow's son at Nain (to say nothing of stories like those of the man revived by touching the bones of Elisha, and of the wonders wrought by Elijah and Elisha during their lifetime³), we cannot understand. But the astonishment from another point of view seems to be amply justified. The announcement of Jesus was like the sudden darkening of a scene which, had thus far been full of brightness. There seemed to be nothing to call for so immediate a change. The work had been little more than begun, and it had been carried on without any very discouraging resistance. Why then these sudden tidings of disaster which had seemingly no connexion with the past? Was the idea conveyed by these tidings one with which they might be expected to have any familiarity, or even any acquaintance? What and where were the scriptures or writings which were said to predict his sufferings even down to the most minute details? Why, again, should his resurrection or uprising be fixed chronologically for the third day? Could this in any way be made plain to them? Had they never come across the prophetic denunciations of the women who, in the temple of Jerusalem itself, mourned and wept for Tammuz, and then rejoiced when on the third day he rose again and started on his career of victory? We have seen already that there is no history in all this; but the accordance of the narrative with the mythical imagery is exact. The solar mythology, which had been crystallised in the religions of Egypt and Persia, of India, Babylon, and Nineveh, has fastened itself with increased tenacity on the traditional creeds of Christendom.

We have nothing to do here with attempts to determine the historical residuum which may underlie the Gospel narratives, or whether there be any. This part of our work has been done; but we may nevertheless mark in the Synoptics the significant fact that, on the evening before his passion, Jesus bids his disciples eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of himself, and that this bread and this wine are to be regarded as symbolical of his body and his blood. Indeed, he is represented as saying that the one is his body and the other is his blood, and that both are given for the remission of sins.

¹ Matt. xvi. 21.² Luke xviii. 31.³ 1 Kings xvii. 22; 2 Kings iv. 36, xiii. 20.

But in the Synoptics there is nothing whatever to lead up to the institution of this rite, if a rite it is to be called. According to the Synoptic records there is nothing liturgical about it; and we find not a word which might prepare the disciples for this addition to the Paschal festival. In short, it comes upon them as suddenly and unexpectedly as the announcement of his sufferings, death, and uprising came upon them in Galilee.

In the Johannine Gospel, as we have seen, all this is changed. Here we have no institution of the Eucharist; nor can there be on the evening before the crucifixion any celebration even of the passover, because he is himself to be offered up on the passover day as the true Paschal lamb. But instead of the memorial commands as given by the Synoptics, we have a series of elaborate and complicated discourses which seem to be designed to educate the hearers in such a way that they may have at least some apprehension of the doctrine which underlies the Eucharistic offering. Of these discourses which form the main body of the Johannine Gospel we have not the faintest inkling in the Synoptics. Nay, the very words of administration as we have them in the Synoptics are changed in form in the fourth Gospel, and made to carry a different meaning. In the former we have the eating of bread, which he says is his body; in the latter the Christian life is made to depend for its growth on the eating of his flesh. The two things are not the same. But whence came all this imagery or symbolism? There is no doubt that throughout Christendom an immense majority are entirely assured that the outward visible signs in the Eucharist were ordained by the Christ himself in such sort that, up to the last evening of his ministry, they had never been used at all. This belief is an absolute delusion. The partaking of bread and wine was a rite as familiar to all the initiated in the Eleusinian and other mysteries as it is to ourselves.

But the reference to the old mysteries only pushes us a step further back. Whence, as used in these mysteries, had these symbols come? In the remarkable Gospel of John, few things are more remarkable than the way in which the objections, jeers, and sneers of the Jews are made to suggest or to draw forth higher and higher statements of esoteric doctrine. The conversation which leads up to these statements begins with a plain exhortation to think more of spiritual than of bodily sustenance. The 'people' in reply ask what they should do to work the works of God. In the Synoptics similar questions are answered by a bidding to keep the commandments. Here they are told that they must first of all believe in him whom God has sent; and here, seemingly, the lesson might have ended, if the people had

not gone on to ask for a sign as a condition of their belief, a sign like the manna, which is here treated as the credentials of the great law-giver. To the answer that Moses did not give them the true bread, but that this bread was himself, the Son, who comes down from heaven, they reply only by a prayer that they may evermore be nourished with this bread. Here, again, there is only the temper of earnest longing for instruction. The antagonism is roused only when Jesus goes on to charge them with unbelief; and the difference is widened when he adds that the bread which he will give is his flesh, which he will give for the life of the world. They had heard nothing of the sort. The idea was quite new to them; and it would have been an astounding marvel indeed if a Galilæan crowd had understood his words in any but their literal and seemingly carnal sense. As it is, they only ask how he can give them his flesh to eat. But instead of saying anything which might in any measure lighten their darkness, Jesus is represented as taking a further step which could not fail to irritate them still more. 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of the Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.'

It seems, therefore, that these harder sayings, which made many of his disciples fall off, would not have been uttered had not the Jews (for so the evangelist now styles them instead of 'people') provoked them by what Jesus is said to denounce as systematic unbelief; and the conclusion follows, that in this way the bread was made to become the symbol of flesh, and the flesh to become the symbol of flesh and blood. Before this declaration (in vi. 53) there had been no mention of any liquid. But for the flesh and the blood there must be the platter and the cup; and thus a full significance is given to the bread and the wine as administered in the Eucharistic rite. That this, however, should be the origin of this symbolism in itself, is as completely incredible as the announcement of his future sufferings, death, and rising again is in the middle of his ministry. These symbols, Dean Stanley¹ allowed, suggested in their literal sense a cannibal feast. His inference was that therefore they had nothing to do with such a feast. But was he right as to the fact? Did these symbols come into being for the first time from phrases used but as yesterday? Was the spiritual interpretation of the Eucharistic language really more ancient than the signs which it employed, or do the signs point in the first instance to a practice which the words in their literal sense denote? Who will venture to maintain the former of these two propositions, when he surveys the dismal records of cannibalism? Who can fail to see that, in the dim and remote past, the whole human race seems to

¹ *Christian Institutions*, ch. vi.

have gone through this terrible stage of life? The tokens of it meet us everywhere; and the conclusion forced upon us is, that this horrible practice became gradually restrained to the eating of prisoners taken in war, that this eating became more and more a matter of formal ceremony to be seriously taken in hand, and assumed more and more a sacramental character, until, finally, a sign or symbol was substituted for the victim. That ceremonial cannibalism, when it became a religious rite, was grounded on the doctrine of the most intimate and profound connexion with the slain man, there is not the least doubt. To devour the heart of your enemy was to make his strength, his bravery, and wisdom your own; and this was a rite, therefore, which might be practised with great devotion by men who would shrink with horror from man-slaying apart from this rite. The ancient religions of America have come to be our instructors; and they are the most absolutely trustworthy of witnesses in this awful history, as the wildest dreamers will not venture to assert that they had come into any connexion with the religions of what is called the old world, for, it may be, one or more millenniums. The Mexicans in the days of Cortez died by thousands of starvation during the siege of the city. They were not, therefore, cannibals in the sense in which the Fijians were cannibals till but as yesterday. With the Mexicans ritual cannibalism was the very essence of their religion, as maintained by a terribly powerful and not unlearned or immoral priesthood. The penitents who came to confess were bidden to 'clothe the naked and feed the hungry, whatever privations it may cost thee, for, remember, their flesh is like thine, and they are men like thee. Cherish the sick, for they are the image of God.' But the same exhortation went on to warn them that before all things they must furnish slaves for the sacrifice.¹

It is quite certain, then, that the discourses in the Johannine Gospel do not furnish any explanation of the very short narrative of the Synoptics. We have seen further that these discourses were never uttered, and that they were slowly and systematically worked out of the devout imagination of the evangelist, as he sat quietly with his writing materials about him. That the authors of the Synoptic Gospels know nothing about them, is also certain, for their Gospels exhibit not the faintest trace of them. The work of the ministry is, by the Synoptics, confined within the limits of a few short months. The adoption of symbols known all over the world for, it may be, myriads of years, is represented in the Johannine Gospel as having been brought about for the first time in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar. The one is as completely incredible as the other.

¹ The religions of ancient America, in *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 366.

Our examination of the Gospel narratives has shown us that, whatever may be said of the previous record, we are left in hopeless darkness for every event or incident which follows the celebration of the passover by Jesus with his disciples. We are free, therefore, to mark in these later passages any features which seem to belong to the great treasure-house of mythical phrases and imagery. In mythology almost every single being may be presented under a multitude of forms. The sun may journey through a cloudless sky, or he may have to fight his way through armies of vapours which assail him with overwhelming pertinacity. He may sink down to his rest in ineffable majesty, or he may die like Herakles, with his raiment torn, and his limbs mangled, by his own convulsions. In the case of Jesus, the formal and public humiliation begins, according to the third Gospel, when Pilate sends his prisoner to Herod, who with his soldiers sets him at naught after putting on him a gorgeous robe. If we take the Synoptics as independent narratives, Jesus was twice robed in gleaming raiment, once by Herod, and once by Pilate's guards. In Matthew, the robe is scarlet; in Mark, it is purple. In Luke, the soldiers of Pilate do not repeat the mockery of Herod. In the fourth Gospel we have, as in the second, the purple robe; but we have also a garment not mentioned anywhere else,—his coat, namely, or tunic, which is without seam, woven from the top throughout. Its colour is not mentioned; but the raiment distinguishes him from all others. We have to compare this with the undivided or seamless robe of Osiris and with the chequered raiment of Isis, the former representing the all-pervading light of the sun, while the latter is a symbol of the varied and broken brightness of the night. In short, we have here the robe of Helios which figures in a multitude of Greek and other traditions. This tunic is one of the solar characteristics which are peculiar to the fourth Gospel, as is also the turning of the water into wine at Cana, a work performed by the sun alone, as he drives the sap through branch and leaf until it is matured in the juice of the grape.

In the cross on which Jesus dies we have a feature which assumes a thousand forms. As an instrument of punishment, it is an object of terror and dread; but the imagery associated with the cross is most commonly that of life, light, and fertility. In this case the two things are confused together, just as it is difficult in every instance to determine whether the term *death* in the New Testament writings is used to denote the death of the body or that of the spirit, the death of sin or the death to sin. Now, however, we may assert without any fear of contradiction that the Stauros, which is everywhere the emblem of reproduction, is the T cross, or Phallos, associated invariably with the

oval or circular ring. In connexion with both is the serpent; and the serpent and phallos are both the same thing under different conditions. In the marvel wrought by Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh the rod becomes a serpent, and the serpent is again changed into the rod. It is this phallic serpent which brings about the transgression of Adam and Eve;¹ it is this which is reproduced in all the ancient cone-shaped buildings of the eastern or western world. It is the rod of fertility and wealth which is given to Hermes by the Sun-god Apollon. It is the rod of Aaron which puts forth buds and leaves in the mystic ark, and which becomes at length the Maypole of our ancient English village-greens. These are but a few of the countless forms which this emblem may assume. The rod may become a spear, a sword or crook, a lituus, a crosier; and in every form it is connected with the oval or round emblem which represents the female power in the material universe. Generations may come and go; youth may give way to old age; but the rod of Hermes and Phœbus can never lose its force; and by it alone are the races of men and animals multiplied. It is hence regarded as the symbol of all that is joyous and glad, of all that is vivifying and healing. As the mythology founded on these symbols is developed, the signs themselves become refined and purified. It becomes the tree under which all living things find shelter,—the tree which is planted for the healing of the nations. As such, it may become the object of worship, contemplative, ecstatic, or frenzied, and may call forth language of the most passionate devotion. The erotic hymns of the Latin Church are legion. The same erotic or sensuous language may be seen in our modern English hymn-books, and seems not unlikely to give a fresh lease of life to the most ancient cultus in the world. The cross of Calvary may be spoken of as a tree of humiliation and shame. It may even be called an accursed tree; but the victim who suffered on it was the great Healer; and it was inevitable that the instrument of his death should be invested with the splendour of the life-giving and life-renewing Stauros. Such a Stauros, immensely magnified, is the world-tree Ygdrasil, on which Odin himself declares that he hung ‘nine whole nights, with a spear wounded, and to Odin offered himself to himself on that tree of which no one knows from what root it springs.’²

Thus, without approaching or dealing with any Christian writings, we are brought face to face with what may fairly be called the highest

¹ That this fact should still be determinately kept out of sight in the teaching of the people is one of the most disgraceful characteristics of the religious thought of the age.

² Cox, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, Book II. ch. i. sect. 6.

Eucharistic phraseology.¹ We have here, in short, the germs, if not the full developement, of a sacramental system, and therefore the foundation of all sacerdotalism. It is hard to discern any essential difference between the sanguinary ritual of Mexico and the daily renewed offerings of the Christian mass. In the former we have both the literal and symbolic form; in the latter the sacrifice has become symbolical only. The language, however, is strictly that of cannibalism; and the lives of saints furnish many instances in which the babe is seen in the act of being mangled and torn beneath the altar, while the saint is going through the Eucharistic formulæ above it. The Mexicans, we are told, consumed the body of the slain human victim with gestures and expressions of profound penitence and devotion. On Christian altars the death is only commemorated; but the bread and the wine are, nevertheless, declared to be actually the body and the blood of the great Healer.

An expression here and there may throw a strong light on the sources of a narrative generally. We have already found parallels for a large number of seemingly mythical statements in the four Gospels; but there are yet others. The enemies of Jesus are driven to surround him with a halo of glory, while their purpose is merely to torture him. The crown of thorns became, in the hands of painters, a circle of light. Again we have the expression of that invincible necessity which brings the career of all the solar heroes to an end. Jesus was the Healer, who had wrought his works of mercy on all who had asked for them; but for himself it was, according to all the Gospels, immutably ordained that he must suffer under strictly specified conditions. He healed others; himself he could not heal. The sun, which evokes all sensible life, must sink in darkness when the day is done. There is no possi-

¹ It may almost be said that, in whatever direction we turn, we encounter this phraseology, sometimes in a rudimentary, sometimes in a fully developed form. 'The Akkadian name of the seventh month is *Tul-ku* (the illustrious-mound), an allusion to the building of the famous Tower, which traditionally took place at the vernal equinox; and on the summit of the great tower of Babylon was the shrine of the Sun-god, who was the presiding divinity of the month. Similarly, on the summit of the various Euphratean *zigguratu* (temple-towers) was placed the altar of the divinity to whom the temple was dedicated; and hence the temple-tower was itself a huge altar. Now I have shown elsewhere that the sky is the original altar upon which is offered the daily sacrifice of the solar photosphere, Tammuz-Duwuzi, 'the only Son' of the diurnal heaven, who in the Phœnician myth appears as Yedud (the Only-begotten) sacrificed on an altar by his father El-Kronos.'—J. BROWN, *The Celestial Equator of Aratos*, p. 467. The traditional argument that the Eucharistic language of Christendom must rest on facts of history as well as on spiritual truth, and must be true because no such thoughts had entered into the human mind before the institution of the Christian Eucharist, breaks down on the rock of the oldest Akkadian inscriptions, as it does also on the mass of mythology generally.

bility of avoiding this doom.¹ But as in the agony of Herakles or of Baldur, so here, all Nature sympathises with the pain of the divine victim. There is darkness over the whole land, and strange figures of the dead are said to rise from their graves in the time of most profound gloom. But all these things happened at the death of Julius Cæsar; and the idea that Virgil was indebted for his picture to our Synoptic Gospels (the Johannine Gospel knows nothing of it) is one which even the most determined traditionalist would not venture to maintain. Earthquake, thunder, and darkness, precede in like manner the death of Oidipous, who is pre-eminently the man of sorrows, which surround him from night to morning and from morning to night.²

In short, the solar day is done; and as the sun sinks down into his unseen abode beneath the horizon, so the great Paschal victim, as he was born in a cave, is placed in the rock-hewn sepulchre of the Arimathean Joseph. But some thirty-six hours must pass before the declining and dead sun can start again on his career of victory. What work was the great Healer to do in the interval? What had become of all the generations of men who had passed away? Had they not all gone to the unseen land, with all their hopes and fears, their faults and sins? Poets had long ago given their answer to this question. In the *Odyssey* and the *Æneid* we have two narratives of descent into the regions of the dead. We need but one; and a hundred such tales would bring with them no benefit to us, for the details of the descent would soon become monotonous and wearisome. There is action; and the action is unseen; and thus unseen the work of the great Healer is renewed in the land of the departed. The so-called Petrine epistle speaks of Him as preaching to the spirits in prison; and later theologians asserted that the realm of Satan was left without a single inhabitant. For Gregory of Nyssa this tradition justified the universalism which led him to exult in the assurance that on the final extinction of evil there should go up thanksgiving from the whole creation. But for all this the mythical substratum remained; and on this foundation has been raised the many-sided fabric of later theology.

We have seen that the most mythical of all the narratives of the passion is that which deals with the Eucharist. For the other great sacrament of baptism no one would venture to say that the sign of water was for the first time employed by Jesus of Nazareth. It is, however, to be noted that the signs of both these sacraments are included in the ritual of the great mysteries. It is not unreasonable to conclude that the two sacraments were also formally developed in

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, i. 338.

² *Soph. Oid. Tyr.* ll. 1242-48.

them. Of the cake and the cup all the initiated partook; and the name of the former seems to survive in that of the 'mass.' The words *Ite missa est* are clearly misplaced in the Latin office; but they may as easily be an invitation to a rite about to begin as a dismissal from one just ended.¹

The traditional theology and religion of Christendom is thus seen to be a result of many factors; and no doubt there may have been at work in it many influences which it may be difficult to trace out and to estimate. Within two or three centuries following its own earliest days the Christian Church either absorbed, or put down, the worship of Mithra. It did so just because the two systems exhibited resemblances of the strongest kind. No one probably at the time could have ventured to say which of the two would prove to be the more enduring. Constantine avows himself a Mithraist after his so-called conversion to Christianity. For the period of Roman occupation of this country there is no lack of Mithraic monuments, while no Christian monuments have been discovered. Both the systems had in large part the same esoteric doctrines, with the same mythical framework. Mithra, the god of the sun, the embodiment of the wisdom and glory of Ahura-mazdao, is essentially, and pre-eminently, the Mediator between Ormuzd and man as liable to the seductions of the evil tempter. He is rock or cave-born and cave-buried. The similarity of the Eucharistic symbolism in both provokes the wrath of Justin Martyr, who complains that 'wicked devils have in the mysteries of Mithras commanded the same thing to be done; for that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn.'² But in spite of all points of contact, although Mithraism spoke of mediation and would have all to be washed in the blood of the lamb, and although the mystical rites in both systems were to so large an extent the same, the Christian Church nevertheless took in hand the task of putting its rival out of sight. The sun-gods of Hellenic or other ancient faiths might live in the songs of lyric poets and the wonderful works of the Greek drama; but their forms were apt to fade, if gazed upon too long or with too highly-strained devotion. In the Christian creed the worshippers had, in the great Healer and Consoler, a visible, tangible man, who, reflecting the glory of the Eternal Father, had, it is said, shown his

¹ Dean Stanley regards the words, *Ite missa est*, as an 'accidental phrase at the end of the service' (*Christian Institutions*, p. 44.) It may to a certain extent be so; but it must have been used in some part of the office; and if it is not now in the right place, the dislocation remains to be accounted for.

² Mithraism, in *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 205.

love and patience in every place which he had visited. Still the traditional Christianity retained so much of the Mithraic system that a Mithraist entering a Christian church might almost persuade himself that he was in one of his own temples. The fight was between a weaker and a stronger mythology ; and in the victory of the traditional Christianity the stronger mythology buried the weaker.

APPENDIX C

THE PARABLES

(See Page 267.)

THE examination of the parables attributed to Jesus leaves us painfully conscious of the dearth, if not the total absence, of historical material even for the period of the ministry. But even if we see clearly that of these parables some have not come to us as he spoke them, and that some were in all likelihood never spoken by him at all, we can scarcely repress the wish to know something more of the sources of these famous narratives. From first to last it is never stated, or, perhaps, even hinted, that these stories all came originally from him, and not from any one else; and there is, perhaps, no reason why they should be all in this sense original. For a satisfactory scrutiny the materials are inadequate; but it is scarcely necessary to remark that the parables labour under the full weight of the presumptions raised against the books in which they are found. Unless in some way or other they carry their own evidence with them, their credit must depend on that of the Gospels, and these in their turn rest on the credit of the Acts of the Apostles. What the result of this inquiry has been we have seen already (Book I. ch. i.), and thus we are left to deal with the parables, separately, as best we may.

Whatever else may be obscure, this at least is manifest, that they have been as much misunderstood by the evangelists as the prophetic writings themselves. The evangelists, indeed, seem quite incapable of quoting from the words of the great prophetic teachers without misapplying and more or less distorting them. In the same way they have taken details from different parables and thrust them into places where they have no meaning; and if their reports of some of these utterances may be fairly correct, the explanations put into the mouth of Jesus never are correct. Of these we may safely say that they could never have come from the teacher who put forth these stories for

the first time. Nay, if we look to the evangelists for the motive and purpose of this parabolic teaching, we should come to conclusions diametrically opposed to the truth.

If the parables be short stories conveying, each, one idea for the instruction of persons incapable of taking in more than one idea at a time with any advantage to themselves, then this form of teaching was for their good, for their enlightenment, for their comfort. But the evangelist actually tells us that it was designed to keep them in the dark, and so to prevent them from prying into secrets, the knowledge of which was to be confined to a small knot of more intimate followers (Matt. xiii. 11-16). This is emphatically asserted in the first Gospel. In the third (viii. 10) the purpose of keeping the people in comparative darkness is even more forcibly set forth. The form, *ἵνα μή*, is the strongest possible expression of deliberate will.¹ We may, therefore, be absolutely certain that the passage from Isaiah was never so twisted and perverted by the great Teacher himself. If we go back to the words of the prophet, we find that they were, every one, to be uttered in the ears of the people whom by these very words he condemned. 'Go tell this people,' was the command given, 'and say, Hear but understand not, see but perceive not, make their heart fat and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see, hear, understand, turn, and be healed.' It was to be, in short, a last despairing appeal addressed to thoroughly hardened hearts. It was the warning that their recompense would be the direct result of their own acts. It was the last expression of hope that the stronghold of darkness might at last give way. But of secrecy or of mystery there is here not the faintest trace. Light, ever more light, was the blessing which the prophet was striving to give to his countrymen. He had nothing to bestow on others which he did not freely offer to them. The idea of any esoteric teaching hidden away behind these words is ludicrous indeed. The evangelist has misunderstood the utterances of the prophet from first to last, and applied them to a subject with which they have not the most remote connexion. The misapplication is not quite so absurd as that of the words of Hosea, which are made to predict the return of Joseph with Mary and the child from Egypt; but the method of dealing with the prophetic writings is in either case essentially the same. In short, the setting of all the parables is absolutely unhistorical; and it is not without misgiving that we

¹ The ascription of judicial blindness to the Jewish people generally is not less strongly made in the fourth Gospel (xii. 37-41) than it is in the Synoptics, the passage from Isaiah being cited as the *reason* for their unbelief, *διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεῖν* *ὅτι πάλιν εἶπεν Ἡσαίας, κ.τ.λ.*

can speak of each particular parable as coming, or not coming, from the great Master.

It is, no doubt, true that justice is not done to a parable, unless we fix our minds closely on the one idea which dominates it, abstracting, so far as we may be able, other ideas with which the central idea may be most closely connected. Unless we do this in the case of the first parable, we shall find ourselves involved in some very bewildering perplexities, for unquestionably its details refuse to fit in with any conditions of earthly agriculture. Not a thought seems to be given to the preparation of the ground, or to protecting it against the attacks of mischievous vermin. In short, we have not a hint that the sower owes any duty to the soil, and that this duty should be thoroughly discharged before he takes the seed into his hand. Again, in all cultivation, even in that of the merest savages, the sowing of seed along the road (*παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν*), on stones, and over thorns, would be looked upon as inexcusable folly, which, if persisted in, must be forcibly put down. Hence, however far we go back, we shall fail to arrive at conditions which at all resemble those of this parable; and if it be needful to find them, we should have to put back the composition of it for millenniums. But it does not follow that the sower is restricted to sowing seed only on what may be called first-rate soil, as representing the good ground of the parable. The needs of the people, as well as his own interests, may compel him to make the best with heavy, sandy, strong, thin, damp, or otherwise defective land. It follows, that the soils mentioned in the parable answer to these varying qualities in the soils with which the husbandman has to deal; and the chief point becomes not so much the result in each case, as the unfailing and unwearied bounty of the divine sower. The whole world of man is the field, over every portion of which his seed is sown, even though it may seem in parts to exhibit nothing but mere stones, brambles, and hard wayside tracts. The sower is, therefore, God, the Father of all, who makes his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust, and sends his rain on the unthankful and the evil. All are in his loving care, and the very worst shall be partakers of his bounty until the unprofitable desert shall become the fruitful field.

Enough has been said to show that we can place little trust in the adjuncts of the parables, or even on the text of the parables themselves. Of the explanations we may say with greater confidence that not one of them comes from the great Teacher himself. They are not offered to those who need them most; the disciples, as they are plainly told, ought never to have needed them at all; and, further, these interpretations introduce features not found in the parables them-

selves. The language of the parable of the wheat and the tares raises a strong presumption that each individual man is the field in which the wheat is sown. It receives the good seed; in other words, man has a constitution (of appetites, passions, mind, will, and conscience), which is good. It is the wrong choice which calls up tares, and fosters moral weeds which grow up along with the better impulses of his being. These tares shall be rooted out in the end, and consumed or destroyed; all that is good shall be carefully housed; and the field shall remain good soil for ever. The explanation takes no cognisance of the good and evil in each individual man. All, according to this illustration, are either wholly good or wholly bad, so that the one set of men may be bound up in bundles to be cast away, while the remaining human beings are stored up in the barn. But the parable had spoken of tares to be plucked up, not of men to be rooted out; and there is no warrant for the gloss put upon it in the commentary. The two may possibly come from the same source; but it is to the last degree unlikely. In common with this parable, it must not be forgotten that in the Eden story there are two gardens, one the paradise with its four streams, the other the garden of the human body. Of the tree in the midst of the latter garden they are not to eat; and the eating of it is the sowing of the deadly crop of tares. But the divine purpose is not therefore to be frustrated; and the end will be the uprooting and burning up of these noxious weeds, and the purifying of the soil in which they had been allowed to grow.

. In addition to these illustrations, some of the parables have affixed to them certain brief statements which, from their very brevity, carry with them great weight, and fix themselves on the minds of average readers with singular tenacity. Two such summary utterances may be found at the end of the parable of the husbandmen in the vineyard (Matt. xx. 16). The one is, that the last shall be first and the first last,—the reason for this being furnished by the second saying, that many are called, but few are chosen. This latter saying occurs again in the same Gospel (xxii. 14) with a very different context, and is not found in either the second or third Gospels. I avail myself here of the unanswerable remarks made by the author of *Supernatural Religion*. Of the parable to which this phrase is appended, he says that—

‘The householder engages the labourers at different hours of the day, and pays those who had worked but one hour the same wages as those who had borne the burden and heat of the day, and the reflexion at the close is xx. 16: “Thus the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called but few chosen.” It is perfectly evident that neither of these sayings, but especially not that with

which we are concerned' [as supposed to be cited in the Epistle of Barnabas] 'has any connexion with the parable at all. There is no question of many or few, or of selection or rejection; all the labourers are engaged and paid alike. If there be a moral at all to the parable, it is the justification of the master, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" It is impossible to imagine a saying more irrelevant to its context than "many are called but few chosen" in such a place. The passage occurs again (xxii. 14) in connection with the parable of the king who made a marriage for his son. The guests who are at first invited refuse to come, and are destroyed by the king's armies; but the wedding is nevertheless "furnished with guests" by gathering together as many as are found in the highways. A new episode commences when the king comes in to see the guests (v. 11). He observes a man there who has not on a wedding garment, and he desires the servants to (v. 13) "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the darkness without," where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth": and then comes our passage (v. 14), "For many are called but few chosen." Now, whether applied to the first or to the latter part of the parable, the saying is irrelevant. The guests first called were in fact chosen as much as the last, but themselves refused to come, and of all those who, being "called" from the highways and byways, ultimately furnished the wedding with guests in their stead, only one was rejected. It is clear that the facts here distinctly contradict the moral that "few are chosen." In both places the saying is, as it were, "dragged in by the hair." . . . The total irrelevancy of the saying to its context, its omission by the oldest authorities from Matt. xx. 16, where it appears in later MSS., and its total absence from both of the other Gospels, must at once strike every one as peculiar. . . . Certainly under the circumstances it can scarcely be maintained in its present context as a historical saying of Jesus.'¹

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, i. 244.—We can scarcely doubt that the proverb, bidding the healer tend himself, said to be cited by Jesus in Luke iv. 23, is another instance of a saying which, after floating a while on the sea of tradition, has at length been assigned to a place with which, as the narrative now runs, it has nothing to do. Why should Jesus cite this saying at this time? His hearers were rejoicing in his gracious utterances (v. 22), and clearly were not even thinking that their teacher needed to undergo any process of healing. How, again, could this self-healing be obtained by, or consist in, doing in Nazareth the works which he had done in Capernaum? No connexion with the idea of the physician healing himself can be traced in verses 24-27; and it is hard indeed to see why a reference to Elijah and Elisha should rouse into a fit of murderous rage (v. 28) the same hearers who, a few minutes before, had been bearing joyful witness (v. 22) to the words of grace which came from his mouth? We are, probably, reading here a confused narrative which refers to many separate and unconnected incidents of which the reports have been dislocated, and the fragments clumsily put together.

The uncertainty which attaches to those sayings is brought out still more clearly if we turn to the earlier clause of this sentence. The Epistle of Barnabas (Book i. chap. 2) quotes the following passage: 'Again I will show thee how, in regard to us, the Lord saith, He made a new creation in the last times. The Lord saith, Behold, I make the first as the last.' The sense of this is, manifestly, quite different from that of the sentence given in Matt. xx. 16. 'The application of this saying in this place in the first, and indeed in the other Synoptic Gospels, is evidently quite false, and depends merely on the ring of words, and not of ideas. In xix. 30, it is quoted a second time, quite irrelevantly with some variation.'¹

In short, these sentences do not belong to the parables with which they are connected; and the illustrations and comments are, not less clearly, also thrust into a text with which they had nothing to do. The idea that the Epistle of Barnabas is citing a passage from the first Gospel is seen to be preposterously absurd.

When the first Synoptic says that Jesus taught the people by parables, and never employed any other method (xiii. 34), he may mean that Jesus never spoke without some illustrations thrown into the form of parables. Thus every discourse would have two or three such tales interspersed among other matter. This may have been his general practice; but even according to the Synoptics, it seems to have been not without exceptions. The so-called Sermon on the Mount exhibits no trace of what can with any accuracy be spoken of as parabolic teaching. Still less does it give any countenance to the meaning assigned to his adoption of this method in the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, it leaves no room for any distinction of esoteric from exoteric teaching. Unless we include the transcendental theology of the Johannine Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount rises to the highest level of human thought. The citation from the sixth chapter of Isaiah, by way of justifying this distinction, is, therefore, labour thrown away. But with the disappearance of this distinction, the historical foundation assigned for this alleged parabolic teaching is seriously weakened.

But after all that has been said, the question remains, When, and in what country, were these parables composed? The lifetime of Jesus is said to fall within the reigns of Octavius Cæsar and Tiberius; and in this case, during the whole time of his ministry, Judæa was governed by a Roman procurator. Whence then came those features, characteristic of the extremest Oriental despotism, which are exhibited with so much prominence in these parables? If these narratives

¹ *Supernatural Religion*, i. 245.

are illustrations of heavenly truth drawn from common or well-known incidents or occurrences of ordinary life within the experience of the hearers, then were the inhabitants of Judæa and Galilee at that time accustomed to the sights and words with which these parables would suppose them to be familiar? Could any one in Judæa or Galilee at this time have ordered a guest to be bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness because he had not some badge on his dress which his host looked for? (Matt. xxii. 13.) Did any existing law allow, in Judæa or Galilee, the selling not merely of an insolvent debtor and all his goods, but also of his wife and children? (Matt. xviii. 25.) By what law was the nobleman (Luke xix. 12) empowered to order to summary execution those who had sent an embassy repudiating their allegiance to him? They may have been rebels in intention, if not in act; but so far they were following some form of law. Were they not entitled to some formal process of accusation or trial? All this would agree entirely with the atmosphere of the court of the Great King at Sousa. Can it be said to agree with the condition of things in the days of Herod the Great or his son Archelaos? If these parables were composed for persons familiar with the life and action of the Persian Shah, then they were not composed by one whose life was spent at Nazareth and Capernaum; and the whole question is brought to an end with the negative conclusion that Jesus never spoke these parables, or that, if he did, he had received them from others. They would thus be simply short stories of which he so far approved as to make use of them in his teaching. In what ways their text has been tampered with, corrupted, and mutilated, we have seen in part already, and in part we have no means for determining with precise exactness.

APPENDIX D

APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS. THE 'GOSPEL OF PETER'

(See pages 153, 393, 474.)

A MANUSCRIPT containing a small portion, seemingly, of the Gospel of Peter, has lately been found in the Christian cemetery of Akhmim. As the narrator speaks, or is made to speak, of himself in the first person (verse 60), and calls himself 'Simon Peter,' we may reasonably infer that we have here a fragment of the record which, in the days of Justin Martyr and later writers, went by the name of that apostle. If, then, this was the Gospel cited by Justin, this document was in existence early in the latter half of the second century. For its existence at any earlier time there is no evidence. It is therefore removed by perhaps a century and a quarter from the alleged time of the events with which it professes to deal.

Whether this fragment belongs to that particular Gospel of which Serapion and Eusebius speak as the Gospel of Peter, and which they both condemned, is a question with which I need not concern myself. The language of Serapion is sufficiently decisive. That of Eusebius is severe. Whether this fragment deserves and justifies all that was said by both about the book which they call the Gospel of Peter, is a point on which we shall do well to satisfy ourselves.

In this fragment the day of the resurrection is called the Lord's day, and it was during the night which preceded the dawn of this day that a loud voice¹ was heard in the heaven by the soldiers on guard, who at once saw the heavens opened, and two men descend from the heaven, and draw near to the tomb (36). The stone which blocked the entrance to the cave then rolled itself aside, and left an open way to the sepulchre into which the two young men entered (37). The soldiers, seeing these things, wake up the centurion and the elders of

¹ The words, *μεγάλη φωνή*, clearly denote articulate utterance. A few lines further on, the voice speaks again, and the words uttered are given (*vv.* 35, 42).

the Sanhedrim, who had shared their watch. While the soldiers are telling their tale, they all see three men come out of the tomb, into which two had entered, the two supporting the third, and the cross following them. Of the two, the heads reached up to the heaven; the head of the third, whom they each led by the hand, rose above the heaven; and they (it is to be supposed, the elders and the soldiers, as before) heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Thou hast preached to the sleeping,'—a reference doubtless to the preaching of Jesus to the spirits in prison (1 Peter iii. 19). To these words the cross, with articulate utterance, announced its assent.

The soldiers now debate whether, or not, they ought to go and inform Pilate of all these things; but before they have made up their mind, the heavens are again opened, and 'a certain man' descends and enters the sepulchre. What this second descent may mean we are not here told. But it is said to have determined all who were present (*i.e.* the centurion, the soldiers, and the elders of the council) to go at once to Pilate and acknowledge that the man whom they had crucified was Son of God (45). Pilate's answer (which seems to be addressed to the mind of the elders rather than to the soldiers), is that he is free from the guilt of his blood, and that his condemnation was of their doing, not his. It is, indeed, impossible that this can apply to the soldiers, who were simply acting under orders; but, practically, in this fragment there are no definite distinctions of time, place, or person. Having heard Pilate's answer, they all (grammatically, these are the elders, the centurion, and the guard) beseech him to command the witnesses to say nothing of what they had seen. Clearly the evangelist did not mean that the soldiers wished this order to be given to themselves; but this is the meaning which the construction carries. The reason given (and this again must come from the elders exclusively) is that they would rather incur the deepest guilt in the sight of God than run the risk of being stoned by the Jews. Pilate gives the order, and so ends this version of a story which is scarcely more amazing than the version given in Matthew (xxviii. 11-15).

The verses which follow tell us of the doings of Mary Magdalene, who, however, does not see her risen Master, although the angel (seemingly the one who had last descended from heaven, a young man, beautiful, and clad in glistening raiment) bids her stoop down and see the place where the body had lain. The last sentence of the fragment runs as follows:—

(88) 'It was the last day of the feast of unleavened bread, and many people kept on coming out of the city, returning to their homes, as the feast was over. (89) But we, the twelve disciples of the

Master, were weeping and in grief; and each of us, grieving for what had happened,¹ went to his own home. (90) But I, Simon Peter, and Andrew my brother, went to the sea, taking with us our nets. And there was with us Levi, the son of Alphæus, whom the Master . . .²

So on the resurrection morning, there were twelve disciples. Judas Iscariot was, therefore, present with them.² Matthew (xxviii. 16) is careful to say that they were eleven, although he sends them, not each to his separate home, but all in a body to Galilee. We may note, that here the disciples know nothing of what had taken place, the circumstances of the resurrection having been witnessed only by those who had brought about the condemnation of Jesus, and by the soldiers who had carried out the sentence. In Matthew the women (and the women only) see him. Here none of the men knows anything before they begin their journey to Galilee. The circumstance that Peter and Andrew had brought their fishing-nets from the Sea of Tiberias to Jerusalem, and now took them back again, is not found in any of our four Gospels. To say the least, they were a mighty weight for two men to carry (twice), over a distance of some seventy miles. In Matthew the message brought by the women raises in the apostles the hope that the risen Master would manifest himself to them in Galilee. Here, knowing nothing, they make their northward journey in an agony of grief and sorrow.

There remains the question of the time when the Gospel took shape. That the writer worked in complete independence of our Canonical Gospels may be very safely affirmed. We may, with equal reason, conclude that he followed some earlier form of the tradition to

¹ This must refer to the crucifixion, not the resurrection.

² The existence of a version of the story of the Passion which had no traitor in it would, if we had any trustworthy and conclusive evidence that such a version existed, be a very noteworthy and important fact. All that we can assert from the recovered fragment is that, according to the story, the treachery is not to be laid to the charge of Judas or any of the twelve. But there may have been other traitors who may have been mentioned elsewhere in the Petrine narrative, although the silence of the fragment makes such a conclusion most unlikely. All that it tends to establish is the complete acquittal of the whole body of the twelve. The result is unfortunate for the credit of the Canonical Gospels. In all of these there is a traitor, and the traitor is Judas Iscariot; but in the fourth Gospel the treason of Judas is woven into the very fabric and essence of the narrative. In the Johannine story (vi. 64) Jesus speaks of one of the twelve as being a devil. In the Petrine tale all the twelve are plunged in the same sorrow on the morning of the resurrection. According to the Johannine Gospel (vi. 64) Jesus knew from the beginning which of the twelve would be the traitor; in the Petrine fragment none of the twelve was a traitor. The statements in John xiii. 10, 11, seem to imply that the predictions of the treachery of Judas were repeatedly made. The Petrine version asserts or implies that the declaration was altogether groundless. The one fact proved by the fragment is the existence of many conflicting versions of the story of the Passion, which more or less excluded each other, and destroyed the historical authority of all.

which the writers of all the Gospels had access, and on which they all worked. Should either, or both, of these propositions be refuted, the issue would not be material to our argument. So soon as it has been shown that our Canonical Gospels (whatever else they may be) are not trustworthy historical records, we have, speaking strictly, nothing more to do. The story of Judas, as given in our four Gospels, has been shown to be from beginning to end, and in every part, a fiction; and we stand in need of no further evidence for this conclusion. Whether in this story we have a version of the Loki legend in the chronicle of Baldur is a question with which we are not concerned. But, if the statements of the fragment of the so-called Petrine Gospel may be regarded as deliberate (and there is not the faintest warrant for regarding them as anything else), the Judas tale is absolutely discredited. The recovered fragment leaves no doubt that one form of the great Christian legend had no story of treason on the part of any one of the apostles. Here, on the resurrection morning, Judas fasts, mourns, and weeps with the rest of the twelve; and thus we have an account which cannot possibly be reconciled with the predictions and representations of the Canonical Gospels, and more especially of the Johannine Gospel.

In spite of these and other like considerations, a strong effort has been made to show that the writer of the Petrine Gospel worked with our Canonical Gospels before him, and that where he does not follow them, the apparently new matter found in the fragment is, in almost every instance, taken from the Old Testament by a process commonly spoken of as the Gnosis. The method of interpretation here followed was systematised in the second century, and more especially in the second half of it; and the system may be fairly described as a way of making anything mean anything. Thus because the prophet Zephaniah (iii. 8) speaks of God as rising up for a testimony (*martyrion*), Cyril interprets the rising up as denoting the resurrection, and the martyrion as pointing to the Martyrion, or Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The bringing of the ass and the ass's colt to Jesus is suggested by the passage in which Joseph is said to bind his ass to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine; and thus the prophecy gives birth to an incident of the history. In other instances this method, it is said, affects only the style; the parables, for example, in the first Synoptic being introduced by the phrase, 'he *opened his mouth* and taught them,' as in the Psalm (xlix. 4) which speaks of the dark sayings. This method is seen in its greatest force when we come to the exegesis of Cyprian. According to him Jesus is 'the rock or stone in Genesis, which Jacob set for his head, because the head of a man is Christ; and sleeping, he

saw a ladder, reaching to the heaven on which the Lord stood ; which stone he consecrated, and anointed with the sacrament of unction, signifying Christ thereby. And this is the stone in Exodus, on which Moses sat on the hill when Jesus the son of Navé was fighting against Amalek, and by the sacrament of the stone and the firmness of the seat of Moses, Amalek was overcome by Jesus—that is, the devil was conquered by Christ. And this is the great stone in the Book of Kings, on which was placed the ark of the covenant when it had been sent back by the Philistines,' etc. So, again, the prophet Amos had spoken of a day in which the sun 'should set at noon, a day which shall be cold and bitter'; and a Father was ready with his interpretation. On the day of the crucifixion there was darkness over the land from the sixth to the ninth hour ; and the cold was so great that they lit a fire, and Simon Peter came and stood with them to warm himself.

It must be added that this system was worked out unflinchingly, and that few systems have had more influence, for good or for harm, on the course of human thought. A treatise, entitled *Peregrinatio ad loca sancta*, ascribed to Sylvia of Aquitaine, shows the working of this system at Jerusalem in her own day ; and shows also the persistency and the thoroughness with which the work was carried on. For three hours daily, during the forty days of the Lenten fast, the people were taught, as Sylvia puts it, that 'nothing took place which had not been previously foretold, and nothing had been foretold which had not obtained its fulfilment.' Prophecy thus reacted on history, or on what passed for such. Nay, it not merely furnished details of incidents ; it supplied materials for incidents, and even for whole series of incidents. So great, we are told, was the success achieved that it becomes difficult to distinguish what may be a direct reference in a prophetic book from a trick of style borrowed from the prophets, or pure legend invented out of their writings. Whatever other results may be produced by such a system as this, it cannot fail to make havoc of the historical sense, and practically to destroy it. It surely cannot be necessary to say that an incident, suggested by words or phrases in any book, cannot be an incident of history at all. The colouring of an incident is one thing ; the fact, even if it be described in high-flown or exaggerated language, is another. But if the supposed fact itself owes its birth to a supposed prediction, it has no foundation, and it answers to nothing beyond the imagination or inventiveness of the writer.

This argument has been pressed with great force against the Petrine Gospel. The author is said to be an adept in this method of prophetic interpretation, and is therefore marked as one who has worked

up or fabricated his history from the most advanced Gnosis of his day, which can scarcely be set down as earlier than the closing years of the second century.

It is a broad and sweeping conclusion to draw from rather slender evidence. A few verses of the Petrine Gospel are all that have been recovered as yet from the sepulchres at Akhmim; but we need not say more here than that the discredit attaching to this Gospel, from the supposed way in which it has been put together, must affect all other narratives which betray the influence of the same system of exegesis. I am in no way concerned to defend the author or authors of this Gospel; but at all events some justice will be meted out to them, if it be shown that their sin is fully shared by the compilers of our four Canonical Gospels. It is altogether inequitable to discredit the former for constructing their narrative on a framework furnished by the language of ancient prophecy, unless it can be shown that the charge does not apply to the latter. But throughout the present inquiry the conclusion has been forced upon us, that all incidents of any importance in the Canonical narratives are referred to passages in the writings of the Old Testament; and that of all the passages so cited there is scarcely one which has not been misunderstood, misinterpreted, misquoted, or else so twisted as to deceive all those who are not on their guard against this so-called Gnosis. These passages have all been considered in their proper places. It is enough here to say that the passage cited as the warrant or sanction for the flight to Egypt and the return from it has been obtained by cutting away the whole context of only five or six words, which are thus made to mean that God the Father called Jesus out of Egypt, although this call in the prophecy is strictly and solely the call of a rebellious house and of children given over to idolatry. If the charge brought against the Petrine evangelist can be sustained, then the whole story of the flight into Egypt and its sequel has as much, and as little, reality as the Gnosis which spied it out in the sentences of Hosea.

Nor is it true to say that the language of the Psalms has affected only the style of the first Synoptic evangelist when he comes to speak of the parabolic teaching of Jesus. The intent and purpose of this teaching is declared to be the blinding of the people, in order that they should not be healed and their sins be forgiven them. This openly acknowledged purpose is declared to be set forth by the prophet Isaiah; but when we turn to the prophetic page, we find that the words have precisely the opposite meaning; and it is, of course, clear that the evangelist misrepresents the Great Teacher quite as much as he misrepresents the prophet whose words he professes to cite. But if the

Gospel of Peter is to be discredited on the grounds of a Gnosis which has suggested the incidents of the narrative, then the introduction of the long series of parables is due to the same Gnosis applied to a passage of Isaiah, which means something totally different.

Still more significant is the astounding change which suddenly comes over the Synoptic narratives when Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem, and puts before the apostles the details of the coming passion. There is no reason for this amazing change in previous occurrences; and the catastrophe now predicted is set forth, not in mere indefinite outline, but in the most minute detail. The whole is put before the disciples as an issue to be brought about by an inexorable necessity, and to be brought about also in exact accordance with the sayings of prophets who had lived in the old time. We have seen¹ how particular and minute these details are; and if the charge brought against the Petrine Gospel is to be pushed home here, it will follow that the whole history of the passion is built up on a collection of sayings gleaned from the old writings; or, in other words, that they are not histories at all. But that they are, or that they may be, the outgrowth of a Gnosis applied to old prophetic writings, there is no reason to deny. It is needful only to remember that all the passages cited are more or less misquoted and misunderstood, and some of them unscrupulously mutilated and garbled.

But the exercise of this Gnosis is openly avowed in the Synoptics. It receives its supreme sanction from the risen Teacher himself in the closing narratives of the third Gospel. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus are rebuked, not for the shortness of their memory and their disregard of facts made known to them in their own experience, but for their unbelief of what the prophets had spoken. The things which perplexed them must happen because they had been foretold; and because they had been foretold, therefore, the Christ must suffer them (Luke xxiv. 25, 26). So in the manifestation which subsequently took place, Jesus tells them that all the things written in the law of Moses and in prophets and psalms concerning him must be fulfilled. Their eyes are then opened, not that they might be able to weigh the evidence of facts, but that they might understand the *writings*, which must be fulfilled (Luke xxiv. 44).

We have here not, perhaps, the exact words ascribed to Sylvia of Aquitaine, but we have a clear statement of the two canons laid down in the *Peregrinatio ad loca sancta*: (1), that nothing took place which had not been previously foretold, and (2) nothing had been foretold which had not obtained its fulfilment.

¹ See Book iv. ch. 2.

So far, then, as the knowledge and application of the Gnosis is concerned, the Canonical Gospels have nothing to distinguish them from the Gospel which is said to come from Peter. In this argument we have most assuredly not the smallest justification for assigning the Gospel of Peter to an author who had before him all, or any, of our Canonical Gospels.

APPENDIX E

MIRACLES, AND THE EVIDENCE OF MIRACLES OR MARVELS

(See pages 140, 151, 351.)

IN the text of this volume (Book III. ch. 10) I confine myself strictly to the examination of the Gospel narratives of marvels, prodigies, wonders, or miracles, as records of historical facts, and nothing else. No one could probably so much as dream of denying that they are related, in the writings both of the Old and New Testaments, as occurrences which have actually taken place. If they have not taken place, they are unmeaning or nonsensical tales, on which it is useless to waste time. But neither, if they did actually happen, can we be expected to credit them apart from any evidence. The apologists for miracles or marvels often write as though all Christians were bound to accept those miracles on which they insist as true, without doubt and without question. 'A man,' we are told, 'cannot state his belief as a Christian in the terms of the Apostles' Creed without asserting them. . . . If a miracle is incorporated as an article in a creed, that article of the creed, the miracle, and the proof of it by a miracle, are all one thing.'¹ Taken strictly, this utterance involves the complete abnegation of all thought. Yet these apologists talk of evidence, and into this the question must resolve itself. For this evidence we are referred to the New Testament writings.

I have examined a large proportion of the four Gospels, with results which may, perhaps, be thought sufficiently clear; the conclusion being that the New Testament histories, and the marvels recounted in them, are alike put out of court, because the records are seen to be historically untrustworthy. They contradict each other and themselves continually on the commonest matters of fact. In other words, there is no proper evidence for the ordinary occurrences which they record, and therefore absolutely none when they deal with extraordinary and

¹ Mozley, *Bampton Lectures* for 1865, p. 21.

preternatural incidents. This being the real issue, it is nothing less than absurd to go off into general discussions on the possibility or the necessity of wonders, or signs, or miracles, as proofs of revelations such as those which are set before us in the systems of traditional Christianity, or in any other. Until such narratives as those of the purification of the temple are shown to be historically trustworthy, all discourse on the paramount need of miracles as evidence for ecclesiastical or popular Christianity is a mere *ignoratio elenchi*.

I must, therefore, steadily resist the temptation which might lure me to mingle in the fray. The temptation is not without a certain degree of force; but the controversy must be left to others, if, indeed, it be not already, for all practical purposes, brought to an end. So far as I may venture to form a judgement, the controversy has been virtually set at rest in the pages of the work on *Supernatural Religion*, to which I have expressed my obligations. It is, therefore, unnecessary for me to go again over the ground which the author of that work has traversed; but I may be allowed to notice some facts connected with the discussion which seem to have a bearing on the historical aspect of the question.

In another Appendix (A) I have expressed the opinion that some of the narratives of marvels or miracles contained in our Gospels are the result of that petrification of language which must take place when spiritual metaphors are put before coarse and ill-educated minds. With this opinion few probably would care to quarrel; but if it may be so with some, why not with more? If with more, why not with all? In the record of the sending of the two disciples of the Baptist to Jesus we have seen the actual process which converted the spiritual metaphor into the thaumaturgic tale. It is, therefore, to say the least, possible that all the narratives of prodigies, marvels, or wonders, set down in the Gospels or elsewhere, may have so taken shape; and in this case it follows that the great Teacher never wrought any bodily or physical miracles, and never refused or claimed to work any. It may also be fairly urged that all the commands for the working of spiritual benefits might be obeyed and carried out into an abundant harvest, while the same charges, interpreted in gross concrete fashion, would issue at best in a few outward cures, or in bringing at most two or three of the physically dead back to this earthly life. How poor a result for so high-sounding a commission! 'Heal the sick; cleanse the lepers; give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. Freely ye have received; freely give.' Yet in the Gospels Jesus raises but one or two of the physically dead, and

cures here and there some who were diseased or possessed or maimed, halt or blind. By the apostles, no one physically dead is, during the ministry, said to be raised to life; in other words, if it was his meaning and purpose that the physically dead should be brought back to their former life, the command of the Master was not obeyed or fulfilled. Again, the thought that a body of missionaries was to be sent forth chiefly for the purpose of impressing earth-bound minds by these poor outward signs or tokens, is humiliating.

But if it be granted that this is the mode in which miraculous narratives generally have grown up, it follows that the concrete story of material wonders is wholly discredited as history. It rests on no material fact, while the old spiritual meaning has vanished into mist. It is a misinterpretation, and that is all. How long the process of converting the one into the other might last, it is impossible to say. The question probes our ignorance of the time when the great Master lived and taught. We have seen that no dependence can be placed on notes of time such as the census of Sulpicius Quirinus, or the fifteenth year of Tiberius. Nor, on the other hand, can we say when our Gospels were written; but there is little room to doubt that they were removed by at least a hundred years from the time of the events with which they profess to deal; and a century of oral tradition would amply suffice for the completion of the process.

We should, therefore, be justified on these grounds alone in rejecting the Gospel narratives as altogether unhistorical. But although it follows that these material wonders never took place, the evangelists, and all whom they addressed, were firmly convinced that they did take place. They have set them forth in the form of historical narratives, and as such, therefore, we are bound to treat them. No doubt the task is one calling for great care, for it might seem as though the Teacher himself had certain notions on the subject of diabolical possession, or instantaneous bodily cures. Yet for all we know, these might be reflected upon him by the imagination, first, of his hearers, and then of those who thought that, in giving shape to oral traditions, they were telling the real story of his life. Of all such folly he, therefore, stands absolutely acquitted; and it must never be forgotten that we have before us not necessarily his actual thoughts, but only the opinions and acts ascribed to him by the gross minds of those among whom he laboured.

But the question whether these were his opinions, or whether they were only what the evangelists supposed to be his convictions, utterances, and acts, is a mere question of evidence; and this evidence is, and can only be, historical. To this evidence, therefore, the apologists

of miraculous narratives should address themselves immediately, so that we may at the least know what that is with which we are dealing. Instead of doing this, they seem to be contented to lay down certain general propositions which virtually beg the question, and then to reduce to a minimum the number of wonders or miracles which they impose as a matter of faith upon others, and, if they be sincere, on themselves also. Thus Butler¹ declares that 'revelation itself is miraculous, and miracles are the proof of it.' But what is revelation, and what are the miracles which are to prove it? The terms are undefined, as Butler's terms for the most part are; and it looks very much as though the revelation and the wonders were the same thing. Whatever revelation may be, it must be something intimately and inseparably connected with the miracle. In other words, the revelation must be one of facts as well as truths. It cannot be, for instance, the theism of Xenophanes, which no more needed the attestation of outward facts than such support is needed for the theology of the Nicene Creed. Naturally the reader of Butler may suppose that he must mean the Incarnation, as it is understood by traditionalists generally; and, accordingly, Butler speaks of that miracle (if it is to be so called). But he does so only to place it in the class of 'invisible miracles,' which, 'being secret, cannot be alleged in proof of such a [divine] mission, but require themselves to be proved by visible miracles.' Where, then, are we to assure ourselves that we may find the proof? The Resurrection is quite as much an invisible miracle or wonder as is the Incarnation. No one witnessed it.²

Both these wonders, then, according to Butler, need the attestation of other wonders; and how are we to know which are the wonders that were wrought specially to furnish these proofs? When from Butler we turn to Mozley, whose comparatively recent defence of the New Testament wonders was hailed as a crushing defeat of those who ventured to impugn them, we are, instead of being enlightened, plunged into deeper darkness. Butler relied on all or some of the other miracles in support of those which he put aside as invisible miracles; but according to Mozley these other miracles cannot be legitimately employed for this purpose. We now find that, of the whole number of the New Testament prodigies or marvels, a large portion are

¹ *Analogy*, Part II. chap. ii. section 1.

² Even in the recently discovered fragment of the Gospel of Peter, it is only certain incidents preceding or following the actual reanimation of the dead body of Jesus which are seen; and these are seen by the soldiers and elders, not by the disciples. How did the report of what these soldiers and elders thus saw reach the evangelists? See Appendix D.

'ambiguous,'¹ and that the instances of 'cures, visions, expulsions of evil spirits' are to be put aside as such,—the reason being that 'the current miracles of human history' are chiefly of this type.² We must then conclude that the narratives recording these wonders are also to be set aside as unhistorical. But these wonders are amongst the signs on which Butler relied as proofs of those miracles which need proof as being invisible. The sacrifice is seriously large; but the Bampton Lecturer regarded it without alarm. The circumstance, he affirmed, 'does not affect the character of the Gospel miracles as a whole, because we judge of the body or whole from its highest specimen, not from its lowest.' In other words, he was thinking of 'e.g. our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension.' But of these two the former must be placed in Butler's class of invisible miracles, which, instead of serving as proof of a revelation, need other miracles in their own support. There remains only what is called the Ascension; and the report of this comes to us from one anonymous non-contemporary work, of which the most important assertions are directly and absolutely contradicted by the great apostle of the Gentiles himself. This is the conclusion to which we are brought after arguments which, in order to obtain standing-ground for two or three miracles, deny that we can reason from an order of nature, or that such an order exists. Dr. Mozley's contention is that we have, and can have, no warrant for assuming the continuity of natural phenomena,—that is, of cause and sequence in the sensible universe,—in other words, that all inductive science is a dream. We seek to know the will of God; we can only learn it from certain incidents which we call miracles or wonders, that is, really, from the narratives which tell us of these wonders; and, as we have seen, these are narratives which are discredited as histories even when they tell us about the most ordinary occurrences.

May it not be fairly said that both Butler and Mozley are, to a large extent, destructive critics? To say the least, their arguments in great part invalidate each other. It is quite clear that the later apologist lays no stress on the acceptance of any wonders, 'except those which it is considered an article of faith to maintain';³ and it is not less certain that the greatest success in proving theoretically the possibility of marvels or miracles generally can do nothing more than raise a presumption in favour of narratives of miracle in general. Such

¹ I suppose that we may take this word as meaning that the occurrences of these marvels cannot be regarded as historical, or at all events cannot be asserted to be such; in other words, that they answer no evidential purpose.

² *Bampton Lectures*, p. 214; *Supernatural Religion*, i. 188.

³ *Supernatural Religion*, i. 191.

narratives are found in the sacred books of all religions ; and they are both more frequent and more detailed in other scriptures than in those of the Christians or the Jews. According to modern apologists no wonders are to be credited except those which belong to Christianity, and very few of these,—*i.e.* some of the miracles related in the New Testament writings. The succession of phenomena, it is said, tells us nothing of the will which produced or caused those phenomena. But an exceedingly small number of what are said to be preternatural events or phenomena can reveal the will of God ; and any one of these preternatural phenomena must consist of sequences of sights and sounds, as do all phenomena. How, then, can the sequence of certain sights and sounds at the time of the so-called Ascension prove any thing more than any other sequences of sights and sounds, which, we are assured, can furnish no evidence of causation whatever ?

Almost all miracles, then, are rejected by those who profess to be upholders of miracles generally ; and hence honest thinkers, who read their general propositions, have only themselves to blame if they do not insist on the production of details. The physical incarnation and resurrection cannot logically be cited, these being according to Butler invisible miracles, which need to be attested or proved by other wonders, and the inverted pyramid stands on its apex, which has the solitary narrative of the Ascension in the Acts of the Apostles to rest on. For this wonder, as for all others, it is admitted that evidence is needed. What is the worth of the evidence produced ? We are thus brought round again to the historical inquiry, which is the legitimate subject of my present task, and beyond which I cannot travel.

APPENDIX F

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

(See pages 379, 466.)

WITH the eschatological discourses of the first Gospel my task is strictly ended so soon as I have shown that the reports of these discourses are not trustworthy, and that the discourses themselves are unhistorical. I am under no obligation to show how they took shape, or from what materials they were constructed. But I feel myself free in an Appendix to deal with a subject which goes to the very root of the traditional beliefs of Christian Churches.

The book known as the Apocalypse is full of pictures which are popularly supposed to refer to a time still future. In the epistles bearing the names of Peter and Jude, we have language of a like sort with that of the Apocalypse ; and in the first Gospel the description of the accomplishment of the age, or *aion*, is said to come from the lips of Jesus himself. According to the popular or traditional notion or belief, it is absolutely essential that the discourses in which these descriptions are embodied should have been uttered substantially as they are here given, and, still more, that they should be the revelation or unfolding of things not yet made known to his hearers or to any who had lived before them. The epistle of Jude (which is little more than a piece of eschatology) cites an utterance or prophecy of Enoch, which must either have come down to the writer as an oral tradition, or have been derived from some book already written. But the words are found in the book of Enoch ; and it is reasonable to conclude that this is the quarry from which the writer of the epistle of Jude draws his materials. But if it was so for the writer of Jude, it was so no less for the writer of the second Petrine epistle, for both these epistles contain a considerable amount of matter, of a most peculiar kind, which in both is *verbatim*, or as nearly as may be *verbatim*, the same.

Now the book of Enoch was composed, according to Archbishop Laurence, in the latter half of the century immediately preceding our own era. In a very short time it acquired among the Jews the reputation of a veritable authentic document; and if mention of it in a book included in the canon of the New Testament writings is to be regarded as settling the question, the book must be both genuine and authentic. But if the epistle of Jude itself be not genuine, then 'it would follow that a book received in the church as canonical, could be regarded also as apostolical under a mistaken opinion as to its authorship';¹ and so the titles of all the books in the canon of the writings of the New Testament lose all authority. In truth, the influence exercised by this book of Enoch on the earliest Christian writers is very wide. 'In the language attributed to our Lord himself, in that of St. Paul, especially in his early epistles, we can distinctly trace an intimate acquaintance with it, and recognise its forms of expression. But above all, this is true of St. John in the Apocalypse, where, it is plain, much of the imagery has been distinctly adopted from that of the book of Enoch.'

Of this book it has been said that the writer 'describes in full outlines the resurrection of the dead, and the Messianic judgement on the dead and living. It represents the Messiah not only as the king, but as the judge of the world, who has the dominion over everything on earth and in heaven. In the Messiah is the Son of Man, who possesses righteousness since the God of all spirits has elected him, and since he has conquered all by righteousness in eternity. But he is also the Son of God, the elected one, the prince of righteousness. He is gifted with the wisdom which knows all secret things. The spirit with all its fulness is poured out upon him. His glory lasts to all eternity. He shares the throne of God's majesty. He pre-existed before all time; and although still unknown to the children of the world, he is already revealed to the pious by prophecy, and is praised by the angels in heaven. Even the dogma of the Trinity is implied in this book. It is formed by the Lord of the spirits, by the elected one, and by the divine Power. They partake both of the name and the omnipotence of God.'²

The book of Enoch is, in short, a perfect quarry of the imagery found in every part of the New Testament writings which speak of the last things, and of the winding-up of the age. 'The "everlasting chains" in which the fallen angels are "kept under darkness unto the judgement of the great day," the "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," the "son of man sitting on the throne . . . of

¹ Colenso, *Pentateuch*, etc., part iv. p. 523.

² *Ibid.* p. 596.

his glory," choosing for the righteous their countless habitations, and destroying the wicked with the breath of his mouth; the "book of life spread" before the Judge; earth, hell, and the grave "giving up their dead"; the joy of the righteous, the shame and confusion of the wicked, who are led off by the angels to punishment; the "new heavens" and the "new earth," old things having passed away,—the furnaces of fire and the lake of fire,—all these appear in the book of Enoch, and the last, the lake of fire, is manifestly a figure introduced with distinct reference to the Dead Sea; and, accordingly, in the same connexion, we find the "angels who kept not their first estate," coupled with "Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities round about them" (Jude 7), which are spoken of as "going after strange flesh," like the angels, and being "set for an example," suffering the vengeance of aionian fire. Nay, those awful words, spoken of Judas, "it had been good for that man if he had never been born," find their counterpart also in the language of this book.¹

This fact, momentous enough in itself, becomes still more momentous when we remember that all these were popular expressions with which all devout thinkers of the age which followed the appearance of the book of Enoch were familiar. It follows, therefore, of necessity that if any teacher speaking to an audience on the Mount of Olives, or anywhere else in or near Jerusalem, should put before them a picture of the great assize of the good and the bad, and of the separation of the one from the other by the Son of Man, he would be regarded as one who was simply exhibiting to them the scenes of a familiar drama, but certainly not as one who was imparting to them a new revelation, far less as being himself the judge by whom that judgement should be exercised. Now, the eschatological discourses in the first Gospel are set forth emphatically as a new revelation, of which, even if the general purport had been to some extent foreshadowed, the details had never yet been embodied in human speech. But it is just these details with which an audience at that time in Jerusalem would be most of all familiar. The conclusion is inevitable. The eschatological discourses of the first Gospel were not, and could not, have been uttered in the form in which they have come down to us in that Gospel, or with the intention that they should in any sense be received as a new revelation, that is, as the drawing aside of a veil which had hidden things thus far unseen; and, of course, there remains the possibility or the likelihood that they were never delivered at all.

Whether these discourses were ever delivered, and, if so, in what form, are questions which I am not in the smallest degree called upon

¹ Colenso, *Pentateuch*, part iv. p. 596.

to answer. They must be settled on their own merits by such evidence as may be at our command, or else be left as questions which can never be answered. But in the form in which they have come to us, they have lost their own authority (whatever that may have been), for it is obvious that their authority is now nothing more than that of the rough-hewn materials found in the book of Enoch. But it is impossible to stop short here. There is no sign that any distinction was meant by the evangelist to be drawn between these discourses and any others. All the discourses in all the Gospels must, therefore, be weighed in the same balance ; and if there be grounds even for doubting that any of them have come down to us in their original form, or that they were delivered at all, these grounds must be stated, if it be our wish and resolution to be straightforward, honest, and truthful. The Sermon on the Mount and the discourses in the fourth Gospel must be submitted to the same scrutiny ; and even portions which some might be disposed to regard as mere trifles must be taken into account, as they may possibly turn out to be of the utmost importance. We have to see whether, or how far, the discourses, or any portion of them, could be intelligible to those who are said to have heard them ; and we have to determine how far the manifest mistakes and misapprehensions of the evangelists detract from their trustworthiness as recorders of discourses dealing with the realities of the spiritual world. Some of the mistakes or blunders of the Johannine evangelist have been noticed already, but in spite of these mistakes he might yet be deserving of some trust as a recorder of the sayings of the great Master ; and if we should have the least warrant for such a supposition, then we should have to go on and weigh impartially the discourses themselves, accepting the results so reached strictly on the evidence furnished by or for each of them. This is the task which I have set to myself, and which I have endeavoured to accomplish in the body of this work.

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